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VOL. IV.

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FOR
FAMILY, CHURCH, AND SCHOOL.

BY
JOSEPH PARKER, D.D.,
Minister of the City Temple, London

IN SIX VOLUMES.

VOL. IV.

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
NEW YORK AND LONDON

To
ALDERMAN W. H. STEPHENSON

OF
NEWCASTLE,

A STALWART OF THE TYNE, A TYPICAL LOCAL PREACHER,

AND

A FREQUENT RECIPIENT

OF THE HIGHEST HONOURS OF HIS CITY,

I CORDIALLY INSCRIBE

THIS MEMORIAL OF MY MINISTRY.

CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE BIRTH OF CHRIST	3
II. A DAILY MOTTO	11
III. CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALISM	20
IV. YOUNG MINISTRIES	34
V. IS THERE A MAN?	45
VI. PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS	53
VII. FAITHFULNESS	63
VIII. CHRIST'S QUESTIONINGS	71
IX. WAITING	83
X. FORBEARANCE	95
XI. THE LAW OF SEPARATION	105
XII. "THINGS NEW AND OLD"	115
XIII. EXCEEDING	125
XIV. PRAYING ALWAYS	135
XV. TECHNICAL OBEDIENCE	146
XVI. "SON, REMEMBER"	156
PHASES OF TEXTS	166
AD CLERUM	192

STUDIES IN TEXTS.

PRAYER.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves ; we do not deceive thee, thou living Spirit, whose eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth. All things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do : but if we confess our sin, thou art faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We now bow before thee in humble, penitent, broken-hearted confession : we have done the things we ought not to have done, we have left undone the things we ought to have done ; God be merciful unto us sinners. We do not know what sin is ; thou knowest : sin is the abominable thing which thou dost hate. We cannot tell what it is ; it hurts the heart of God. Jesus Christ is the answer to sin : where sin abounded grace did much more abound, as the ocean abounds over the pebbles at its depth. The blood of Jesus Christ thy Son cleanseth from all sin : the answer of Christ's blood is the answer we would make. God pity us ! have mercy upon us ! speak from his great heaven of righteousness and lift us up by the exaltation of the Cross. And yet we live in hope ; we live in thy mercy : because thou art pitiful we are spared, because of thy mercies we are not consumed ; thy compassions surround and protect us. We have come together to thank thee in this larger and family relation for all thy tender mercies and lovingkindnesses towards us. Thou hast beset us behind and before, and laid thine hand upon us ; thou hast kept our feet from falling, our eyes from tears, our soul from death. We will not be dumb in the house of our Father, we will praise him with loud and tender voice. Who can number his lovingkindnesses ? who can say where his compassion ends ? Thou hast been with us in our outgoing

and in our incoming, in our downsitteing and in our uprising, and thou hast considered us: we thank thee with loving hearts, too full for words, love beyond all speech. We thank thee for those who have been spared in life and health and prosperity and gladness of heart; their cup of the divine wine is full, and they drink it in the Lord's sanctuary, and are thankful to God for all his mercies. Some have been taken away from us, the young and the old; thou didst snatch them away in the night-time, and when we awoke we saw nought but emptiness. Pity those who stand around recent graves,—alas! all graves are recent, for who can bury the heart and forget it? But if any have been suddenly bereaved, do thou come with balm from Gilead, with healing from thy holy place. Others have been perplexed and sore distressed and tried by rivers of tears; and yet they would not let go their faith, because thy Spirit was in them, working out a great triumph in the hour of distress, and they wish—humbly and remotely it may be—still they wish to join in the common psalm and to join their voices in the uplifting universal adoration. We have come together as fellow-worshippers; we mean to approach thee as it were hand in hand, and heart in heart, making a great ring and circle around thee, and beseeching thee with all tender love and entreaty to be pitiful to us and careful and mindful of our lives. We have come together as fellow-readers and fellow-students of thy Book. Thou didst write the Book, thou alone canst teach us how to read it, thou only knowest the meaning of the living pages; so we come to thee, not for to-day's gospel, but for the everlasting Gospel, eternal as thine own being. Feed us with thy truth; comfort us with all the solaces and inspirations of thy grace; and make us strong men, right valiant in the face of this age, to speak out thy word as we have found in our daily experience of conflict and of joy. And look upon us all; we are many in number, but who can count our varieties of experience and desire? Forgive the pleading, confessing sinner, because he clings to the Cross and begs for mercy; come into the heart of him who is sore in spirit and deeply wounded by the arrows of the Almighty, and teach him that wounding is part of thy great process of healing; and come to those who dare not tell their sins in open words, unsuspected sins, unsuspected sinners, whose hearts are praying to thee in expressive silence that thou wouldst come with healing and renewal of hope and kindling of best desire: the Lord hear the unspoken prayer. And if any are in great perplexity, fearing to-morrow, wishing that thy Sunday might continue all the week, that the spirit of rest might be in them and about them,—break their fears by

the light of thy hope, and give them to say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him"!—and to-day let the victory of the Cross be realised in their deep and joyous experience. Be with our loved ones everywhere: the old man at home who is sick and weary, the sweet mother that cannot be here because of many cares, the child that is ill. Be in the house of laughter lest the laughter become folly, and deal thou out of the vessel of prosperity lest men wax fat and forget God. A great light be upon all the nations, upon all the lands, upon all efforts and enterprises and endeavours to make known the Gospel of the Cross. O hear us! come nearer to us, much nearer, that we need not speak our prayer, but only feel it, breathe it, sigh it into thine own listening heart! Amen.

I.

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

"Now when Jesus was born."—MATT. ii. 1.

LET us, as far as possible, carry our minds back to the period immediately preceding the birth of Christ. We cannot but be conscious that there is a sense of expectancy in the very air. Every one is sure that something is about to happen that will have a powerful effect upon the conduct and destiny of mankind. A curious feeling is that which precedes a great change. The old course has worked itself out, a desire of change has sprung up in the mind: perhaps the desire is all the more pathetic that the heart cannot explain its urgency or its dumb aspirations; some such feeling may take possession of the mind in the hour and article of death. Paul had a "desire to depart." What is the meaning of such desire? What is its range? How is it enlarged and strengthened by unknown spiritual ministries? These questions can only be answered by men who have passed through the gate which on one side is blacker than night,

and on the other is brighter than all the glory of opening day. Placing ourselves mentally amongst those who lived in the days of the birth of Christ, we cannot but share the common expectation. What is going to happen? Who is coming? With what pomp and circumstance will he come? How will the old heavens be rolled together like a scroll? How will the old earth be covered with a new mantle of loveliness? Imagination has its answer ready, but the answer of imagination is always conjectural and speculative, and is often not only reversed, but confounded by historical fact. It was pre-eminently so in the case of Jesus Christ. The world was to be changed by the birth of a Babe! Thus we may put it in a literal sense, forgetting the high significance of such a birth, meaning as it does spiritually that man is the gift of God, and that the moment the Babe enters the world the world itself is handed over to a new and perfect redemption. In asking ourselves what Christmas means to the world, we shall lose nothing by getting rid of certain accessories and superstitions which had nothing to do with the original intent and purpose of the Incarnation. Looking at the Incarnation as the birth of the man may be the best way of finding our way back and up to original and exhaustive meanings. Christmas now means to us Christ's birthday. But why this ado about the birthday of a child? Countless millions of children have been born into the world, thousands are born into it every hour; why should this Child have a pre-eminence so overshadowing in majesty and influence? Why should all other children be baptised in his Name? Why should he represent ideal and even celestial childhood? These questions are founded upon the commonest matters of fact. Whoever Jesus Christ was, his Name to-day is the most potent name in history. For two thousand years no name has had so

deep an effect upon human thinking and upon the spread of civilisation. Is the splendour of Christ's majesty fading? Is the energy of Christ's influence declining? Who celebrates the birth of Moses or Abraham, of Solomon or Paul? Yet for centuries courts and governments, wealth and poverty, destitution and orphanhood, have dated their letters from Bethlehem, and calculated the calendar from the sorrow of the Virgin. There must be some meaning in all this, and thoughtful men are bound to inquire what that meaning is. John Milton says: "One day there will be a resurrection of great names." England is about to celebrate the millenary of Alfred the Great, to put up some visible memorial of his rulership and large-mindedness. The record is crowded with great names, and yet towering above all is the name of the Bethlehem Child, the Only Begotten of the Father! Not only is this the case as a matter of common fact, but the very greatest men in history take off their crowns, and with rapturous adoration cast them at the feet of Mary's Child! What is the meaning of this? It is not superstition, it is not sentiment, it is not transient emotion; the temples, the minsters, the abbeys, the cathedrals, and the humblest conventicles, scattered over the face of the whole earth, are so many tributes to this supreme Child of the world.

I. Is not Christ the highest interpretation and expression of that greatest of mysteries—*Personality*? It is by personality that the world is governed. If we really look into the matter we shall find that it is the lawgiver, rather than the law itself, who rules our civilisation and directs our progress. So far as human laws are concerned, Society may be personified as the lawgiver. No law can live that does not represent the current sentiment of the age. Judges tell us that they cannot administer any law which

has become a dead letter—that is to say, any law that does not express the current and active sentiment of the time. Thus Society energises its own laws and gives them all the impressiveness and magnetism of living personality. This is one of the most interesting features in the study of Christianity. In quite the largest sense of the words Jesus Christ is still saying to his Church, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” Those who commune most deeply and continuously with Christ are most assured of his actual presence and personal influence. To them Christ is not set back as a dim figure in the fading centuries; he is the most active and dominating presence of the immediate moment. This is not to be explained in words or made clear to the common reason, but it is not the less a ruling fact in experience, and an inspiring consciousness in the whole development of life. There is more of Christ in them than in any other man—more of him, more in him, more done by him, more, therefore, done for him. The supremest motive still is, “The love of Christ constraineth us.” We know Christ no longer after the flesh, but for that very reason we may know him more intimately by spiritual perception and appreciation. The Bethlehem Babe is now the Christ of the whole world. In his Name we pray, in his priesthood we confide, in his blessing we are rich, in his service we are blest. No merely book-Christ could have wrought the wonders which are daily accomplished by his realised personality. He is near the soul, he is in the soul, he rules the soul, he thrills and sanctifies the soul. If we do not realise this happy experience we have not yet come into our full inheritance of grace and truth.

II. Every day the message of Christmas to the world is, that in Christ only do we realise all that is meant by

spiritual *completeness*. "In him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." We are complete in Christ, because in Christ all completeness is fulfilled. The believing soul never goes out of Christ for anything essential to growth, culture, inspiration, hope, and vital energy. We have all things in Christ. All things are Christ's; therefore, in having Christ we have all things, in having Christ we have God. Many illustrious teachers and leaders have been efficient and sufficient at various useful points, but Jesus Christ is equally strong along the whole line of his personality and kingship. Nature, as well as grace, culminates in the adorable Saviour. Science and philosophy find their completest expression in Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul did not scruple to find all things in Christ. The great expressions of the Pauline epistles cannot be properly construed without investing Christ with everything essential to completeness of life and character and service. "By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him." To whom, therefore, can we go to make up the deficiencies of Christ? What other teacher or leader must be called in to make up that which is lacking in the Son of God? "Of him, and through him, and to him are all things." It is impossible to construe such words in a way which leaves the faintest trace of deficiency or incompleteness in the personality or priesthood of Jesus. "He is the head of the body, the Church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell." This is the view which the true Christian takes of the completeness of Jesus Christ. To the Christian, Jesus is chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely.

He believes that Jesus Christ upholds all things by the word of his power ; and that he is the One Personality which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty. This fulness illustrates and confirms the essential doctrine of the ever-enduring Personality and Presence of Jesus Christ.

III. Christmas sets before us, as it were pictorially, the very highest and sublimest conception of moral character. Human nature needs such exemplifications. Christianity is a grand appeal to the senses, as well as to the spiritual understanding. We are to behold the Lamb of God, look upon him, watch him, take special note of the whole expression of his life. Jesus Christ himself said, "I have given you an example." In the very largest meaning of the terms he says to all men to-day, "Follow me." He embodies his own beatitudes. If we want to know what human nature is at its best, we must look at the Son of God. Although there are points at which he stands infinitely above the reach of our ability, although he is nothing less than God manifest in the flesh, yet there are other points which are imitable, and which, indeed, we are called upon expressly to reproduce, in our own degree, in our personal character. "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love ; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." The message of Christmas is—Represent Christ. As he was, so are we to be in the world. Some would so learn Christ as to make a mere image of him, a spectacle to be admired rather than to be copied with disciplinary sternness. "But ye have not so learned Christ. If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus : that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old

man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts ; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind." Such passages enable us to testify that Jesus Christ has had the most powerful and gracious effect upon human experience. Every Christian is a miracle of grace. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature : old things are passed away ; behold, all things are become new." Such miracles Jesus Christ is working to-day as certainly as he worked them when he was visible amongst us. "Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." He does not make his followers better externally and mechanically, so as to present a good appearance to the world. His cleansing is internal, spiritual, complete. We are renewed in the spirit of our mind. A clean heart throbs within us, a right spirit inspires our ways. A great voice is continually sounding in our ears : "Be not conformed to this world : but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." Jesus Christ is re-incarnated in the experience of all who truly love and follow him. "Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering ; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any : even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." These are not ancient virtues, outworn moralities, temporary laws that have been superseded by higher legislation. These are to-day's virtues, to-day's crown of glory. "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children ; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." What wonder if a Man whose personality,

was so intense, and whose character was so glorious, should continue to be the supreme mind of the civilised world? Jesus Christ is not a suppliant for his life. He does not beg us to continue to respect him. He works so profoundly that all other workers are ashamed to compare their service with his, and he works so beneficently that the world cannot do without him. No orchard bears fruit like his, no river is so full of water as the river of life, no smile is so benignant as the light of his countenance. The message of Christmas to the world is a message of goodwill, neighbourliness, brotherhood, fellowship, noble and sweet and helpful. The danger is that men should consider that the message of Christmas is merely ethical. For my own part I have a growing distrust of the word "ethical," because I see it is separated, in many instances, from the spiritual and priestly work which Jesus Christ came into the world to complete and establish. Men are trying to invent a morality. We are now too much governed by programme and schedule and experiment; we do not get back to the foundation truths of redemption by blood and sanctification by the Holy Spirit. Believe me, the morality which is invented, or carved, or painted, is a very poor respectability, a calculation that works itself out, because it does not go back to eternal counsels and everlasting purposes. The only morality that can endure is the profoundly theological morality that draws its motive, its inspiration, and its sustenance from the Cross of Christ.

II. A DAILY MOTTO.

“Into thine hand I commit my spirit.”—PSALM xxxi. 5.

THAT is all we can do even in New Testament times. Wherein have New Testament saints excelled the excellent men of the Old Testament? Not one of us has got beyond this point. We may take it, first, in a spirit of accommodation, and then in a spirit of genuine exposition; and in both cases we come to the same thing—man voluntarily handing himself over to God. There is an instinctive sense of ownership. Sometimes we know perfectly well that we are not our own. We do not give God the gift in any sense of mere donation as of our own grace; we return him that which is his own. We are God's, we belong to him; when we really seize that thought and turn it into practical conduct, we are converted. There is no need to sneer at the old word “conversion.” It has a practical meaning in personal life, in social and political life: why should it not have its largest meaning in spiritual experience? I repeat, when a man says, “I am thine, I acknowledge thy altar, I commit myself, body, soul, and spirit to thee; own me, take care of me, and guide me,” he is a converted man. Once he handled himself, was his own master, the idol of his own house; beyond himself he saw nothing, now he sees that God is Sovereign, Creator, Father, Redeemer, and he says, “Take my poor life, fold

it in the arms of thy love, guide me with thine eye, and afterward receive me to glory"; and when he makes this great speech he knows that he is uttering eloquence that is quoted, and is quoted because he himself is inspired. This is the new life, the great, grand, eternal life: this is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent, and to hand over oneself into thy blessed fatherly, shepherdly keeping.

We often think of these words in connexion with death. There is no reason why we should not do so. The Master himself said that he committed himself, his Spirit, into the hands of the Father. This prayer—for such it really is—was uttered on the Cross: at the Cross we must utter it. Our sublimest petition is but an echo. Stephen used these words, at least in their spirit, when he said, "Into thy hands I give my spirit; receive me, take me up into the light, and turn martyrdom into coronation." Hence we have come to think of these words as constituting a dying speech. If they are a dying speech, here is no thought of extinction or annihilation; here is a distinct proclamation of immortality, at least of life after death. The man does not say, "I am being killed, slain, crucified, put an end to; give me courage to bear the last agony like a man"; He says, "I look beyond the slaughter of the body, and I offer my spirit to thee, thou Giver of all life: Lord, into thy hands I commit my spirit." Only they can see over the grave who have been really brought down to its edge. In fatness we do not see heaven; in the middle of the thick pasture, through which a stream runs at which we can quench our thirst, we do not see heaven, we do not feel our need of heaven, we ought not, therefore, to write in our books about heaven, or to promulgate any opinions concerning after death. Only the dying have seen death.

They cannot tell what they have seen ; they cannot write a book concerning it. We know not what visions fall on the glazing eyes, but we infer through all the teaching of Holy Scripture that when man comes down to that last extremity he sees what in the noontide of his strength was graciously and purposely withheld from his vision. We shall see death when we come to die. Yet how much we owe to the men who at the last have spoken about their spirit ! Men talk soberly at the last, surely. They get rid of superstition and all meanness of mind and limitation of time and space, and then in that moment of agony they speak the truth—naked, simple, pure truth. If so, they tell us that the spirit expects survival and would make provision for immortality.

If we make a picture of the text, it is a scene of exquisite and pathetic beauty. It is the picture of a man depositing his life in God's hands. When there is great danger in the house, men take out their most valuable possessions and deposit them where the security is strongest. When there is a panic in the city, men take away all their treasured possessions and leave them where they can find them when the day of calamity is overpast. Here is a man depositing his spirit in God's hands, and saying, as it were, "I do not care for the body, I make no provision for the mere flesh ; my one anxiety is about my innermost self, my soul, my spirit, my immortal part : to whom can I give it but to God ?" In God you find the security for your immortality. No other power can hold a man ; no other being has capacity within which to hold what we mean by spiritual manhood. Only God can be the casket of the soul. Where is my spirit hidden ? Into what treasure-house have I really put my true self ? Who holds me, claims me, directs me ? If myself, then I am

guilty of the most palpable and mischievous paradox ; if any one meaner than myself, then I am guilty of the most ridiculous absurdity and trifling. If I have deposited myself with God, then I know that thieves cannot break through or steal, moth nor rust can corrupt or canker ; all will be well ; come what may to sun and moon and stars, fall what may of blight and curse on the green fields that have grown for me my daily food, I will abide in the tabernacle of the Most High.

Or is it another picture ? Shall we still think of it as referring to final dissolution ? Then we have the picture of the house falling to pieces ; but the tenant flies away. The body is the house, the spirit is the tenant ; when the house falls to pieces the tenant may escape. " We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." The Apostle distinguishes between himself and his body, between his soul and the outward convenience which supplied him with the instruments with which he should do a certain kind of outward work. We must properly distribute ourselves, or we shall often be operating at the wrong end of things : we shall be feeding the flesh and starving the soul. The house must fall ; the wind will take the roof off ; the tremendous currents beneath will sap the foundations ; all the gilded walls must fall in. What is to become of thee, my soul, my spirit ? I tell thee we will now go to God and say, " Keep me every minute." Let the soul deposit itself in the security of heaven. He is a fool who has made any other provision ; he is an infinitely greater fool who has made no provision at all. The man who lives a haphazard, harum-scarum life, without rooting itself in infinity and lifting up itself into eternity, that man deserves not to

be spoken of with ordinary respect ; he may have a reputation for sagacity, but out of his own mouth he will be condemned if he has made no provision for the rest and the progress of his soul.

Take these words as we may, either for life or for death, they explain the life of the man who utters them. Is it the latter ? They sum up his beneficence, his religiousness, his noble reverence and glorious piety. Is it Stephen ? He does not pray now for the first time ; he is getting in some sense an answer to his prayer in receiving the stones that killed him. Men do not learn to pray in death. In death they utter their greatest prayer ; they take up all their prayers together and consummate them into one climax, with which they victoriously assail the opening gates of heaven. We shall pray best in death if we have lived in God. Living should be praying. Praying should never be a separate act, detachable from the current of daily experience and action. Prayer should be part of ourselves, "Prayer is the Christian's native breath !" When our religion is superimposed, it is an encumbrance ; when it grows up in the heart or soul under the inspiration and sanction of God the Holy Ghost, then it is part of ourselves—not an external quantity, but an inward and eternal breath.

But as used in this psalm we have nothing to do with death and dying petitions. We have here what should be a daily motto. Every morning we should say, "Into thine hand I commit my spirit" ; and the day cannot end in failure. Every morning when the merchant goes out to his work he should say or sing, "Into thine hand I commit my spirit," and when he comes back at night he will come back a wealthy man ; yea, though his hands be empty there is treasure in his heart, an inexhaustible

wealth. You cannot impoverish the good man. When he has nothing to eat he may eat most. "I have meat to eat that the world knoweth not of," said Christ. The disciples said, "How can he have meat? no man hath given unto him; how is this possible?" These disciples were victimised by materialism or literalism. The soul that lives in God is never hungry. The time will come when the soul shall triumph over the body. That is done in part now. Man shall not live by bread alone: he has sometimes lived by spiritual communion, by profound, filial, tender intercourse with God, so that at the end of forty days he will not know that he has abstained from food. He is lifted up into the larger consciousness; in that solemn Sabbath he knows nothing but God: concerning his Father in heaven he says, "I live and move and have my being in thee." What does that doctrine really mean when put into other words? It means that our selfish will has been destroyed. Until that will is destroyed we can have no life in God; we may be often in the vestibule, but not in the inner sanctuary; we may have come to the point of wonder, but not to the elevation of faith. How to get rid of self is the daily and awful problem of life. Except a man deny himself, and say: "I have no self in any sense that opposes the fatherhood of God: I have no self that is its own Bible, and its own inspiration, and its own destiny"; except a man deny himself, his very personality if need be; except a man shall say, "Lord, whatever the future may be, a future of personality, or a future of humanity in the sense of the sum total of human life, I care not; if it be thy will, it shall be mine; not my will, but thine be done; if I have to be taken back again into the great sum total, so be it; if I have to live individually, personally, with conscious self-identity, so be it: thy will,

my God, not mine, be done." When a man comes into that mental estate, he has accepted the Cross of Christ, and he is following the Blessed One on to the ever-unfolding destiny of the universe. How to get rid of this self-identity and this self-will ; how to outpray it—that is the difficulty. Sometimes it is quite under us, and we are away on winged strength and radiant hope, having forgotten our little self and entered into our true self, which is identification with God. In such blessed moments we see how possible it may be to be nothing and yet to be all, to be no one and yet to be all in God ; and how possible it is to retain every memory of earth, and yet to enter into every rapture of heaven. Do I give myself into God's hands, or do I give myself partly into the hands of God? Do I say, "I want to be pious, and I also want to be sagacious"? Do we give way to the infamous profanity which is often quoted as the sum total of wisdom, "Pray and trust to God, but keep your powder dry." That is a bitter and impious falsehood in the soul of it. In so far as it is really wise it is a consequence, and not a merely selfish precaution. The keeping the powder dry is not a separate act, it is the continuance and the culmination of the trust. Never so divide the acts as to imagine that they are unrelated, or that they stand to one another in a merely mechanical sequence. The one belongs to the other ; the one, if we begin at the right point, is the other in all its holiest meaning.

But is there to be no self-care? Not a whit. I have never undertaken my own care without getting wrong ; and I have never given myself absolutely over to the divine will without proving it to be right. I have to say "No" to my own sagacity every day ; I have to hunger my own cleverness into submission ; I can only so besiege

myself that hunger shall become an instrument of conversion. To my own mind it is clear that this might be done, that the other is possible, and that if certain events supervene then the issue would be solid and even glorious. But this is atheistic talk ; I must take it, as it were in writing, to heaven's court, and say, "Lord, this is what I have written : nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done. If thou dost say to me, 'Burn that paper,' I shall be sore of heart : it looks to me so well done, I have thought about it so much and so long ; but if thou dost bid me burn it, it shall be burned." Then I am a Christian man, but if I persist in carrying out my own programme and policy, see it all torn to pieces by the retribution of events, and then go whiningly to God with a sort of nominal and external penitence, I may expect to be driven from his throne. Do not turn your sagacity into a new reason for contrition ; do not so reduce your supposed great ability as to have to find in the reduction another excuse for saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Be wise before the event. God is often hungering me down ; but I love to be so treated after a while. I know at certain moments what I should like to do, and I feel that God must be on my side, but the Lord sends me a sign and says "No" ; and I take my little programme and put it into the fire, and the next day I say, "Lord, I thank thee for that 'No' ; Lord, into thine hands I commit my spirit." If we do this in the right tone of mind we shall never be wrong ; if momentarily misapprehended or misunderstood, God will cause our night to break forth as the morning, and our judgment shall go out as the noonday. Oh, rest in the Lord ; have no life of thine own to pester thee ; let it be God's life in Christ.

God waits for this committal. His Church has never

made it yet. Now and again it has made it in individual instances ; often it has made it on paper, in creeds and documents and declarations. God waits for his whole Church to say in solemn unity, " Not my will, but thine, be done." God waits for his Church to go into Gethsemane and sweat, as it were, great drops of blood, and to pray that it may escape this penalty and that, this difficulty and that, this hill and that ; and yet he waits for that Church to say, " Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done," and then, though the red drops mark the face, as if we had been murdered by insane hands, even then through all the crimson there shall shine a light of confidence, there shall beam a presence of strength that Calvary cannot extinguish. God invites this committal ; God rewards this committal ; God waits for us to give ourselves right up into his hands. Now, no praying linked with atheism ; no giving oneself to God, and then taking care of oneself : no man can serve two masters. " A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." He is wavering and hesitating and trembling ; he is neither on the one side nor on the other, and the issue is emptiness, barrenness, nothingness, shame, disappointment, perdition ! Here, then, we wait for the supreme miracle. Self-extinction is the beginning of self-realisation. We pass to the crown by way of the Cross. Other way—hear thee, believe thee ; hear history, believe history—other way, there is none. Let this be the motto of every day ; let this be the legend on every soul ; let this be the epitaph on all sepulchral marble, " Into thine hand I commit my spirit."

III.

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALISM.

“They . supposed that they had seen a spirit.”—LUKE xxiv. 37.

THAT is the way we are always putting God back from us. We are always supposing some kind of nonsense or other. We have a genius for belittling things. Some men hate poetry and pictures and music and metaphysics: all these things lie close to the invisible and the ineffable. When a man is a very high metaphysician he is as near as possible being a spiritual believer; you may expect at any moment to find that he has gone over to the orthodoxy of all believing faith. When the Church had been praying that Peter should be given back to them, and Peter was given in answer to prayer, they said to the damsel who brought the gospel of his release, “Thou art mad”: if thou hast seen anything at the door of the gate it is his effigy, his spirit, his angel. We have a wonderful desire to believe in anything but reality; we are fond of believing in optical illusions and delusions. Along that line it is impossible to say how far some men would go; they would go a million miles further if they could meet anything new in the way of optical illusions; there you could have the most numerically prosperous Church in the world. If any man would found an institution on the doctrine of optical illusions I do not know where his roll of membership would end; I suppose the

world itself would hardly contain that roll of members. But when God fronts us, looks at us, stuns us with a new revelation, we say, "This is indigestion, nightmare, momentary derangement and hallucination": is there nobody can rub his eyes into seeing prose, fact, stone, history? We will not have God; we will have him at least in our own way, and according to our own measure, and at our own times, and under our own appointments; we will attend to him indifferently or reluctantly one day in seven, and as little of that day as possible: but when he looks at us in every dawn, peers down upon our little school-world through every star that throbs in the night, when he speaks to us in the fragrance that is wafted from every hidden flower or open beauty in the summer garden, then we say, "This is fanaticism"—any *ism* that will get rid of the personal, approaching, condescending, sanctifying God. The Church is the worst of all unbelievers. It is the Church that is infidel, and the Church ought to know it. The Church has a long roll written all over with what it believes, and as long as it can subscribe that roll it supposes itself at liberty to do all sorts of things that contradict the spirit of the testimony. The Church is nothing if not spiritualistic; the Church is an invention and an encumbrance if it live not, move not, and have not its being in things unseen, immeasurable, ineffable, eternal.

There are wonderful instances of feeling, surprised thought, and sudden quickening of the whole manhood that cannot easily be accounted for except on the principle that there is in this universe more than we see with the eyes of the body. We need not go to the Bible for such instances. The Church has a prejudice against the Bible; it believes that all the Bible anecdotes should be read regularly, and forgotten systematically. There is a

wonderful truth in what the poor agricultural labourer said to his clergyman. The clergyman said, "I have just come back from Jerusalem." "Jerusalem!" he said. "Is that a place?" "Yes. What did you think it was?" "Why, I thought it was a Bible word." That is what the Christian Church in all its departments has done for the Bible. It

as not given it fresh air, space, liberty; it has woven around its Bible a fictitious sacredness in which it has lost the holiness that belongs to it of divine right. There was an illustrious preacher in London called Henry Melvill. He was popularly known as the "golden lecturer"; he was known to some readers of ecclesiastical history as a modern Chrysostom, a man with the golden mouth. He was rhetorical, eloquent, graphic, pictorial in a very high degree. Men who did care for that kind of speech cared for it immensely. It was not the kind of speech that you and I are accustomed to, or value at any high price: it was foaming, tumultuous, on-rushing, climacteric, sweltering, tremendous. It was not easy, conversational, domestic, instructive, colloquial without vulgarity: but of its own kind the Melvill preaching stood alone for pomp of words and for wonderful pictorial power of representing spiritual truth. There was a young Congregational minister, now gone from amongst us, who studied Melvill night and day; he became imbued with the very spirit and genius of Melvill; to Melvill himself he had never spoken, he had never touched the hand of his idol: but he preached Melvillism, out-Melvilled Melvill in the style of his eloquence. He thought there never was such a preacher in the world. That young Congregational minister was in the far north of Scotland, and with his wife was walking through a little graveyard there, and suddenly the young minister said, "I feel as if Melvill were near me." In less than five minutes Melvill passed through that remote

country churchyard. We know this to be a fact. How did it come about? "I feel as if Melvill were near": a man to whom he had never spoken, whom he had never seen out of the pulpit; and yet somehow—ay, in that "somehow" there is range enough for a new philosophy—he felt that his idol was close at hand, as it proved to be the fact within a very few moments. I knew the young Congregational minister. This is not something we have read in an anonymous book; this is something that can be tested by what is fallaciously called fact. Oh, what lies facts have told!

I know a minister who is living to-day, as truthful a man as ever lived, who tells of two men looking out of a window of an inn. They both heard footsteps below; one saw a figure, and said, "You see the man there?" and the other said, "No; I hear footsteps, but I do not see anybody." "Why!" exclaimed the first speaker, "he is so high, has such and such a face, is dressed in such and such clothes; can you not see him there?" "No, I cannot," said the second speaker; "but you have described my father, a man you have never seen." By the next post he learned that his father had passed that way—passed into eternity.

There are those who tell us that such things are optical illusions, momentary hallucinations. If we like to commit ourselves to these polysyllables, so be it; but is there not a grander thing to commit oneself to, another possibility, a quite higher range of thought? Who are the fools?—they who commit themselves to the doctrine of continual hallucination, and thus make themselves little better than maniacs; or the men who say, "There are more things in heaven and earth than have been dreamed of in any philosophy"? I prefer to number myself, if they will allow

me, with the latter company : it is nobler in reason, finer in temper ; it is more poetical and ideal in the whole cast of its being and thought.

A friend has written the case of a German servant she had. The girl had not seen her father for eight years ; he was in Germany, she was in England. She came one morning in great fright to the head of the house, and said : " I have had a dream in which an envelope was handed to me by my father, and on the envelope was written, ' Oh, death, where is thy sting ? ' I am sure," said the poor girl, " he is dead ; I know it, I feel it." And in due time the intelligence was brought to her that when she saw that envelope her father had just thrown the last enemy in the mortal combat and gone up a hero, crowned victor through the power of Christ. Who are the fools now—the fanatics ?—the men who say, " Such things cannot be accounted for except on stomachic action and hallucination and optical illusion and nightmare ;" or the men who say, " This universe is bigger than we thought it was, and there are avenues all through its spaces along which there pass messengers from heaven, visitors from eternity " ? On my soul and honour, it seems to me as though the Christian believers were the true rationalists.

Why did that lady take such a sudden prejudice against her medical man ? He had been accustomed to come to the house and had been on cordial terms with the family, yet suddenly the lady was conscious of an unaccountable revulsion. Asked why she felt so, she replied, " The moment he took hold of my hand this morning I heard a pistol go off, and I felt as if he were a dangerous man." Of course this was fanaticism, foolery, optical illusion, any kind of polysyllable that excluded God. For a long time the matter was kept secret. At length the doctor was told

of the revulsion of his patient, and he said : " That is very remarkable. That morning I had been called in to attend a suicide : a young man had shot himself through the mouth. When I went into the room I took up the pistol, held it in my hand for some time examining it, and I went immediately from that house to the house of my lady patient ! " How do you account for this case ? These things we have on record, testified by more witnesses than one and testified in writing ; if you will read a book in two huge volumes called " Phantasms of the Living," you will find that men of the highest education, men of scientific attainments, men of public position have committed themselves to the veracity of everything stated in these books, and there you will find such instances as are worthy of record of the sacred volume itself. Who are the wise men ?—they who say, " Think no more about such things ; " or they who say, " In such things there is an influence at work that ought to be studied, calculated, and brought into such use as may be possible " ?

All these things show us that there is a great deal more than we commonly see or hear. They are blind who have only bodily eyes. We see nothing as it really is. We are in a world of masks and shadows and broken symbols : the real world is beyond, around ; the real world is heaven. You can gluttonise yourselves so as to shut out God. Understand that if you do want to be downright atheists it is possible for you to be such : eat enough, drink enough, forget enough, shut your eyes long enough, and you may make beasts of yourselves if you like. You can rot yourselves so completely that men have to be paid heavily to carry your carcases to the tomb. That miracle is possible : but it is the business of the Christian Scriptures and the Christian ministry and the Christian Church to lead men

up to another level, and to reveal to them another view and aspect of things, and to say, "There is a faith-life, a spirit-life, a heavenly life, a life immortal. Come, thy Father calleth thee to higher manhood, to nobler realisation of being." If the Church will commit itself to this high task, she can never have any competitors ; if she will make a servile maid-of-all-work of herself and go down and argue with every little fool that has found a new word and a new little riddle—she will become one of ten thousand other agencies ; but if she will stand where she has a right to stand, as the interpreter of a large universe, calling men from littleness, selfishness, meanness, injustice, to the larger associations, the poor will know her voice, and they will respond to her music. Do not suppose that the Church disables herself for coping with so-called practical questions when she realises and asserts her more spiritual prerogative : when she loses that function and that prerogative she can only mumble at the council table, she cannot expound with authority and enforce with the right of conviction. Do not believe, let me repeat for the thousandth time, men who say, "The universe is little and contemptible, and we can see all that is needful to be seen and grasp all the factors that are available for the outworking of every problem, simple or complicated, of human life." Believe those preachers who say, "As the heaven is high above the earth, so are all true thoughts above the vain and troubled and selfish imaginings of men."

Such enlargement and idealisation of the universe is in harmony with the coldest reason. By the way it is a mistake to think that Reason is cold. She has, if we may personalise Reason, wonderful power of self-suppression ; she can be calm, tranquil, apparently immobile ; she can look as if she never had a feeling. That is not Reason,—that

is her shadow, logic. Reason is the synonym of harmony, justice, right, truth, and these are not unkindled colds. Yet we say this enlargement of the universe and of all the possibilities of life is in harmony with what for the sake of convenience we called the coldest reason. For look at the largeness of things. Man has a meddlesome hand, but even that meddlesome hand has never defiled the horizon. There are things on which God has not written, because he need not have written, "Touch not!" or, "Hands off!" We may warm ourselves in the sun, but the sun itself no man may touch. Look at the minuteness of things. There are more lives upon a single leaf in the forest than in multitudinous London: every life highly organised, every life a miracle; and are we to be told by irresponsible chatterers that we can see all that is needful to be seen, and that if we will simply put on our coat and our hat and take up our walking-stick and come back again, the whole duty of life is thereby very largely discharged?

Rather let him teach me who says, "Lo, God is here, and I knew it not: this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." If I respond to such appeals my whole emotion will be lifted up to such a level and expression as to make all justice and all charity necessities if I would live a life of harmony, proportion, and music.

Men should be chastened and wisely humbled by all the possibilities of life—that is, of the higher, subtler, more spiritual life. We cannot tell who is listening to us. Close your eyes (this is how I sometimes bring myself back from half a moment's infidelity)—close your eyes, has the action of the house ceased because you cannot see it? are the children all dead because we cannot see

them? has love ceased her sweet function because you cannot see the handmaid, the mother, or the sister, through whom that function operates? Has the exclusion wrought by blindness annihilated domestic or communal economy? Open your eyes: all your friends are about you, all the ministry of the house has been going on, though you could not see it. What, have we the power of annihilating all the sublimest realities by simply shutting our eyes? Why, then we would blot out the sun; why, then we would sweep the heavens at night of all their jewellery; why, then we should turn the summer into the blankness of absolute gloom. So our inner eyes are closed at present; but that does not necessitate the absence of spirits, angels, ministrants divine, servants sent to minister unto us by the King of heaven. Let us be chastened, quieted, humbled; because we cannot tell how near we are to things eternal, and we do not realise the possibility that eternity is always nearer to us than time can ever be. You say that what is called Spiritualism has been convicted of a thousand impositions and trickeries; so be it. There have been men who have mimicked honesty that they might rob the unsuspected: is honesty therefore an impossibility? There have been men who in the name of the public weal have wrought out private ends: is philanthropy therefore impossible? No doubt a thousand hypocrisies have been perpetrated by mean men. We are thankful when every such hypocrisy is exposed and denounced, yea, and turned out of society as with a whirlwind of righteous contempt. There are impostors everywhere: let that be wholly acknowledged; yet still there are things that we cannot deny that point in spiritual directions, that indicate the invisible and the eternal. How to seize these things profitably, and to operate upon the faith which they ought to nourish is the great problem of

earnest men. I am superstitious, and yet I am highly stubborn.

We used to have a little thing in our house called *planchette*, which, for the sake of the little ones, I may explain to be a little rough triangular instrument with a pencil put through one point. The little toy runs on wheels, and will spell for you words from the alphabet which you write at the top of the page ; you simply put on your hands, have a thought, or put a question, and expect some answer. Of course, if you are fools enough to delude yourselves, and push the little toy up to A N D, there is no penal law against your making such consummate asses of yourselves : even that you can do ; but if you are earnest, and commit yourselves to spiritual or magnetic or nervous action, and see the results, you have a right to conclusions wrought out by honest inquiry. My friends were busy with this little lady when I went home, and I said, "Well, if it will answer me a mental question I will believe in your little wooden toy. I have asked a question, now let *planchette* answer me." The little machine ran about, and my friends said in a spirit of almost self-ridicule, "It has written——," and then they mentioned a name. As it is the name of a living man I will not now quote it. I said : "That is the most mysterious thing I have ever known. The question which I mentally asked was, 'Who is to be the architect of the City Temple ?'" We were then about to build the church in which we are now assembled, and the little toy wrote the name of a man who had that very day submitted plans for this edifice. It is open to those superbly and consummately clever men who know more than God knows to say, "Oh, all that was delusion." You must destroy our characters before you can destroy our evidence. These things can

easily be so treated as to be made subject and material for imposture by others, but such debasement of reality and fact is not to be regarded as disproving the largeness, the minuteness, the marvellousness of the economy of things under which human life is developed.

Scripture is full of visions. Of course anything that is in the Bible we can easily get rid of by simply not believing it. We can make short work of the Bible by calling it superstitious, oldfashioned, out of date. There is a short and easy method with the Bible; whether it is a sufficient and adequate method I will leave common-sense to say—it never has commended itself to my mind. But remember that all the visions that are in the Bible are accompanied by stern moral requirements; no vision in the Bible is ever given for the sake of gratifying mere curiosity. The Bible is not a show-book, it is not a gallery of miracles, it is not a museum of wonders, it does not say, "Come to me, and I will tell you such startling things as your ears have never heard before." Wherever the Bible has a vision it has a commandment. The moral tone of the Bible is the proof of its inspiration. Wherever there stands a miracle there stands a law—Thou shalt, Thou shalt not: Go, Come, Give, Teach. The miracles are but helps to the continuance and perfection of moral discipline. In presence of such visions and revelations, we may seem to have a basis and warrant and hope; we cannot tell what shall be on the earth; there shall be a new earth, and there shall be new heavens, and righteousness shall dwell in places that have been disinfected, yea, holiness shall find a sanctuary on the earth that pollution had once defiled. We cannot tell what the generations will bring forth; we know not how bright and fair and beautiful man may yet be,—we are in process, we are part of an elaborate

complex economy. All things work together for good. Do not stop the Operator, do not try to obstruct him by putting frivolous or far-fetched questions. Realise the fact that we are part and parcel of a sublime economy, and that it is our business to be watchful, intelligent, patient, devout, until a voice shall fill all heaven and earth with the announcement, "It is finished." We cannot tell how near our friends may be. We do not know how many little children spirits there are in the air; we know not why we do this or do that; we have really no good and valid account to give of the origin of ideas and the operation of the mysterious processes by which we are moved, directed, inspired, changed, encouraged, or otherwise affected: we have our little philosophies and conceptions of all these, but he will be wise who believes that beyond the visible there lies the invisible, and he will be devout who does not deny to God the power to communicate between the two. Let him work in his own way and at his own time and under his own conditions: thy will, not mine, be done.

How much controversy we should avoid if we took this line of thinking! I heard a controversy imaginatively the other day. There was a very nice, well-kept, four-footed animal walking along a greensward, and presently it began to utter sounds of disapprobation; and I said, "Why do you groan and mutter so?" And the answer was: "Look at that pool of water there, you see what grieves me; you see presumption, you see what I call being wise above what is written. There is a duck swimming: why cannot it be content with walking? Look at me; I never was in a pool of water in my life: the solid earth for me, if you please. But all this ambitious vanity, who can bear it?" And the duck sailed gracefully in the limpid water. Presently

the duck began to complain and criticise ; and I said : " What is the matter with you, poor bird ? " And it said, " Look up ; there you will see what ought to annoy any one who regards sobriety and common-sense as part and parcel of life. See there ! What is it ? " It was an eagle flying, hunting the sun. Then I turned and considered, and said, " They are all right, if they could but know it. It is right that some should walk, it is right that some should swim, it is right that some should fly." And the eagle would have been, I think, the worst of the three if he had looked down and said, " Oh, you stupid, earth-loving, earth-clinging creatures ! why not come up here ? " By the right of eagleship, be thou above such criticism ; sail away in the unmeasured space, and let each do everywhere what he can. So it is amongst men : some walk, some swim, some fly. But are we not all servants of God, and is there any one who has a right to exclude the other ? Young man, believe in the larger universe, the larger humanity, the larger faith, the larger hope ; say that you cannot see the whole case yet, and therefore you suspend your judgment. Meanwhile you have one thing to do—your duty, according to such lights as are granted in this little schoolhouse with which we begin our education. We have the ever-present, ever-teaching Christ, God the Son. He loved us, he gave himself for us ; and one hand was upon us, and the other hand was away upon the riches of the universe we had not yet seen. Let us patiently, lovingly follow him from Bethlehem to Calvary, to Bethany, and he will not leave us there. The cloud that comes down in chariot form to take him upward to the higher spaces will have room enough for the least of us.

PRAYER.

GRANT us thy peace, O Lord. "Great peace have they that love thy law." The peace of God passeth understanding. Jesus Christ promised to give unto his Church his peace, saying, "My peace I give unto you : not as the world giveth, give I unto you." We would enter into his rest ; we would know the joy of the Lord's own peace. He is our peace, who hath made both one by his Cross, reconciling us thereby, and thereby destroying the enmity. Lord, grant us thy peace. The Lord will bless his people with peace. Now may we enter into the rest of God. Thou hast set us in a wonderful world, full of tumult and sorrow and death. There is no rest in time ; it is too short for rest, it is too mean for joy. But we aspire to the eternal. This desire is kindled in us by God the Holy Ghost. Thou hast set eternity in our hearts. Thou hast not made us for time. We will rest in heaven. Help us to walk now worthily, usefully, joyously, in so far as we may within these little limits. To this end may the mystery of Christ abide in our hearts ; may each heart be Christ's Bethlehem ; may Christ be born in each the hope of glory, the Child that shall keep the world young. The Lord help us to follow the truth of Christ, in obedience, in simplicity of heart, in purity of motive, in unselfishness of desire,—then shall we enter into the manhood of Christ, being perfected in his wisdom and in his grace. Lord, help us thus. We could not have breathed this prayer but for thyself dwelling in us. This desire is not of the earth ; it is from heaven—a spark of the eternal flame. For all thy love and thy goodness how can we praise thee in sufficient song ? Thou hast been mindful of us in tenderest care ; thou hast considered us as if we were thine only household. We forget that all the worlds are thine, and thou art the Housekeeper of them all, spreading the table, finding the water to quench the thirst of all. Behold, thou hast not forgotten one of us ; even in the darkness of the darkest night thou hast set some star. Lead us the few remaining miles of the journey : we see one steep hill and one great valley ; and we know not what that cloud in the western sky wholly means—it may carry thunder in its gloom. But go thou

with us ; take hold of each hand, beset us behind and before, and lay thine hand upon us, and the hill shall be smoothed down, and the valley shall be lifted up, and the cloud shall dissolve in dew. We give ourselves to thee in daily oath. We would live in the spirit of perpetual consecration. God bless us, God help us. When the heart is sore, thou knowest where the balm is that can heal the wound and bring back the peace ; and where life is entangled in one great perplexity, thou knowest the road out, thou hast the key of every gate, thou knowest where the bridge is that spans the river—where it is widest, and where it foams and boils most. The Lord grant unto us all we ask in so far as it is good, wise, useful to our true growth and our perfecting in the purity and loveliness of heaven. Bless all the children, and all the old men, and all the travellers, and all the visitors, friends who are with us for the morning and gone again to-morrow not to be seen any more : be with them on the earth and on the water, and take them safely home with a new song in their mouth, with a new joy hidden in their heart. Lead us to the Cross ; lead us to the fountain of the Saviour's blood. Give us heart-cleansing ; make us white as snow untrodden ; and in thine own time and way bring us to the gates of gold beyond which is the summer of thy heaven. Amen.

IV.

YOUNG MINISTRIES.

“ But Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child, girded with a linen ephod.”—I SAM. ii. 18.

A SWEET picture ! Here is a child who came into the world, as it were, through the very gate of prayer. So to speak, he was the direct creature of intercession. His mother went immediately to God's house for him ; actually went straight up to God, and asked him for the child. A singular circumstance is recorded in connexion with this prayer of Hannah ; namely, while she was praying Eli the priest “ marked her mouth,” but heard no word—“ only her lips moved, but her voice was

not heard : therefore Eli thought she had been drunken." See, then, how priests even may be mistaken in their interpretation of human action. A woman who was praying was actually thought to be drunken ! Gentle and touching was Hannah's answer ; it was plaintive as the voice of disappointment : " No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit : I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord." She said that she had spoken " out of the abundance of her complaint and grief."

This answer was more terrible than a scream of revenge. A man may be drunk, but not with wine. Sorrow may make his bones shake, and cause him to stagger like one in whose blood there is poison. Let us be careful, then, how we read the signs of life that are round about us, for so near may the good approach the evil, and so closely may the evil approximate to the appearance of good, that even an Eli may be mistaken in his interpretation of the actions of life. Out of all this sorrow and prayer came the child Samuel. It was a fit introduction to the life of one who was to connect two great dispensations in the history of religious and civil development. Here, then, is a child-prophet, and that fact is pregnant with the deepest signification. That a child should have any place in God's temple, and especially that a child should hold office in that temple, is a circumstance which should arrest our attention.

God's interest in human life begins at the earliest possible period. This is an argument for infant baptism which I have never known to be touched, much less shaken. The narrow critics who have taken upon themselves to settle that question have been fighting each other with Greek derivatives and grammatical inflexions, as if

any moral question could be settled by such means! I make this question one of life, not one of grammar; and I put this direct and urgent inquiry—namely, “When does God’s interest in human life begin? When does Christ’s heart begin to yearn in pity over all human creatures? When does compassion’s tear well into the Redeemer’s eyes? When does he feel the kindling of love towards human beings? Is it when they are five years old, or ten? Does he shut up his love until they are twenty-one?” The question may appear quaint, but I press it; I urge a distinct answer: “When does Christ’s interest in human life begin?” I contend that his interest relates to life, not to age; to birth, not to birthdays. As soon as a child is born, that great redeeming heart yearns with pitying love.

What has Christ to do with what we call age? What is age? It may be useful for us to keep a record of anniversaries, to tabulate for statistical purposes, to call one man twenty and another forty—though forty, in reality, may be less than twenty. But will you presume to reduce Christ to a commercial agent, who deals with men according to their ages? No! I hold to it as a sweet joy, a most delicious and enrapturing thought, that Jesus Christ interests himself in me, that my name was written in his heart ere it fell from my mother’s lips, and that before a father knows the mystery and pride of parental life Jesus experiences the travail of the soul which yearns to make the child an heir of immortality.

Hence I see a beauty in infant baptism which is unequalled—in Christian parents bringing their loved little one unto the temple, and having poured upon it the clean water (Christ’s own symbol of purity), and having pronounced over it the great threefold Name in which we live and move and have our being.

It is said, however, that the child cannot understand the deed, and consequently cannot receive any good from it. Shallow, indeed, is such reasoning! Understand? What is understanding? Does the child understand the mystery of drinking life from its mother's bosom? Does the child understand the sublimer mystery of the clasped fingers and uplifted eyes with which the mother supplicates the benediction of heaven? Be it known unto you all that all our blessings do not come along the narrow highway of our poor understanding; the children taken up into the Stranger's arms did not understand that that Stranger was the Saviour, and that that Saviour was God! I warmly encourage all parents to bring their children early to the temple, to carry them to the sacred place, to lend them unto the Lord before they can give themselves away. And what know we but that the mother's loan may be confirmed by the man's own gift?

"Moreover, his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice." Great rivers have often little sources. The river of a whole year's joy came out of making this little coat. It seems a very simple circumstance to put down in the world's great volume that Hannah made Samuel a little coat every year! What has that to do with the volume of divine revelation? I find all these little touches exceedingly pleasant and comforting. The mother working for her far-away boy; and God thinks even that worth putting down in his book! God does not think anything trifling that concerns any of his great family. He watches the flying shuttle, marks the progress of industry, unites the bond of friendship, and cements the deed of love!

Mark, then, how age must work for childhood, strength

must toil lovingly and helpfully for weakness. The resources of life must be expended on the children of need. This is the way to obtain happiness—namely, by making those around us happy. He who sends joy down to the roots of society shall find that joy reproducing itself in the solaces and comforts of his own life. The making of this little coat caused the hours to fly speedily ; and the gift of it, at the appointed time, enriched the giver more than it enriched the wearer. So it is that giving is getting, and that scattering may be the truest consolidation of wealth.

Now let us advance a step and see how this child proceeds. In the ensuing chapter he is still called a child—a ministering child. Experience has taught me to have more faith in children than in adults. Children are more like God than men and women are. Children are unsophisticated, straightforward, simple, trustful, joyous, loving ; adults are often crooked, crafty, double-minded, selfish, moody, rancorous, and vile. I sympathise with the poet when he wishes that he could go back to God through his “yesterdays.” Alas! there is no way to heaven except through our to-morrows ; and as we get older by travelling through these to-morrows we often lose the simplicity and beauty of childhood, and engross ourselves with engagements which tend rather to degrade and unfit us for the high society of heaven. I implore you, therefore, who have the charge of juvenile training, to be careful how you exercise your function. Never forget that even a child may be a minister in the temple, and that it is never too early to clasp young hands in prayer and teach young lips to adore the Name that is above every name.

According to the opening verse of the third chapter, “the word of the Lord was precious in those days ; there

was no open vision." That which is rare is precious. The word of the Lord did not shine forth in noonday glory; it was like a glimmer on the horizon. God's kingdom on the earth begins with small demonstrations. It is small as a mustard seed. Oftentimes in the Gospel narrative it is likened to all minutest things. In our day there is open vision. The whole heaven is blazing with light. The letters upon the divine page are, so to speak, enlarged and multiplied, that men everywhere may behold them and comprehend their divine meaning. Yet who cares for this fulness of opportunity? When there was no open vision the word of the Lord was precious. Men valued their opportunities; they were eager to avail themselves of the faintest ray in order that they might prosecute the journey of life; they listened anxiously for any whispering of divine communication, their ear was trained to intensest acuteness, for the very rarity of their privileges made those privileges the more precious, and the very dimness of the twilight made those upon whom it fell the more solicitous to avail themselves of its advantages. But who cares to-day, when England is flooded with the celestial glory? To-day the word of the Lord sounds forth from coast to coast more loudly and distinctly than thunder; to-day the vision shines with a glory above the brightness of the sun; and yet those who ought to walk in the light, straightforward into everlasting habitations of purity and rest, are turning their backs upon the source of the effulgence, and walking with all the speed of flying time down to the bottomless abyss. "Woe unto thee, Chorazin!" might well be spoken by the Saviour; and if we substitute the name of our own nation for the name of Chorazin, we should not be transgressing the lawful boundaries of propriety, for we, as a nation, being exalted to heaven with multitudinous privileges, are not

unlikely to be cast down into hell through our perversion and personal neglect.

It is a beautiful picture this of Eli and Samuel engaged in temple service. Here we have extreme age and extreme youth united in the same labour. It is as if sunrise and sunset had found a meeting-point; here is all the brightness of the one and all the gorgeous colouring and solemn pomp of the other. What is the lesson? The lesson I see is, that God has work for all classes. The full-grown prophet may speak his comprehensive message in the audience of a wondering nation, and infant lips may be opened in the utterance of mysteries which involve the destinies of empires. I know not of any community or organisation in the whole of civilised life except the Church of God, in which age and youth can thus be beautifully and usefully blended. This is an argument for the divinity of our spiritual life. It touches the extremes of being; the seraph burns with the mystery of this life, and in the child's heart the same mystery is throbbing in hopeful pulsations. In Christ the whole family in heaven and on earth is named. In him the great and the small, the old and the young, the magnificent and the simple, are centralised, and from him they derive their immortality and their bliss.

The next scene is one of extraordinary sublimity. The account of it is contained between the second and the tenth verses inclusive. Eli lies down in his place, and his eyes begin to wax dim that he cannot see; Samuel also lies down to sleep, and while yet in his first slumber a voice addresses him, saying, "Samuel." The child knew not whence the voice proceeded, but imagining that it came from Eli, he addressed himself to the aged prophet, who wondered, and counselled the child to return to his

rest. Again the voice said, "Samuel," and again Samuel returned to Eli; but the prophet knew not the meaning of the act. Yet the third time the voice called, "Samuel," and a third time Samuel spoke to Eli, and then the meaning of the transaction was suggested to the prophet, and he dictated words which the child was to use in the event of the voice being heard again.

Looking at this scene, we have, first of all, Almighty God calling man at an unlikely time. The time is night. Deep sleep has fallen upon man, and in the time of rest and unconsciousness the voice from heaven sounds. Why not in the temple, and why not in the open day? This is like God; the darkness and the light are both alike unto him. And does not God call men in the night-time even now? Why, every star is an appeal to man! The darkening heavens are eloquent, and every star that glitters in the wintry canopy has a communication from the Infinite to declare! Let us, then, remember that no time is exempt from the calls of our divine Father. In the pomp of mid-day he comes to us, blazing with all effulgence of glory, and addresses us with majesty and overwhelming force; in the hour of midnight he approaches his sleeping ones, and by dream or vision or still small voice would hold intercourse with his saints.

In the next place we have Almighty God calling an unlikely person. We should have thought that it would have been more probable that God would have called the aged prophet rather than the ministering child. But the first shall be last and the last first. The Holy One of Israel is not limited in his resources. He sends by whom he will send. It is the method of the divine government, so far as our circumscribed history will enable us to speak of so vast a subject, to disappoint all human calculations

and to set at nought the wisdom of all who would speculate as to the divine procedure. We may enlarge this incident so as to find in it a great principle of exquisite beauty and of world-wide application ; that principle is that Almighty God is constantly sending messages by children. Will you who are parents think of this ? Every child in your family may be as a prophet of the Lord unto you. Almighty God does not despise the minute, and the obscure, and the weak, but hangs the dewdrop of the morning upon the simplest flower in the mead, and when he has had occasion to speak to a prophet, he has declined the services of thunder and whirlwind, and earthquake, and addressed the fainting one in a still small voice. Poor would the world be without little children. There is more of meaning in their little curious questionings than we ever apprehend. Why, the touch of a child has turned back the murderous intent of the parent who has slept with the little one in his bosom ! The request of a little child has again and again been the means of turning the considerations of parents in a God-ward direction. In innumerable instances the child-life which God has placed in a family has been the means of uniting that family in the holiest and tenderest bonds and preventing developments of depravity which would have involved the household in irreparable ruin. He is old indeed who cannot receive instruction from a little child. When the Saviour would inculcate one of his most profoundly significant and practically useful lessons upon his disciples, he took a little child and set him in the midst of them. In that case the Saviour called the Church around a little child ! Small indeed was the centre around which so vast a body revolved ! Imagine the scene—a Church looking at one object, and that object not a blazing seraph or a crowned angel, but only a little child ! There is beauty in this which should arrest our

loving attention, and a simplicity here which should rebuke all our vain conceits.

In this scene we have also the revelation of the true state of men for receiving God's messages. "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth." It is the place of the creature to listen to the Creator. Take heed how ye hear. Good listening is one condition of progress. He who listens well hears well, and he who hears well has the best opportunity of understanding what is communicated. The Church is greatly in want of good listeners, especially in want of those who will listen to the voice of Almighty God himself. There are many voices in the world appealing to our ear; but amid all the clamour of such appeal it ought never to be forgotten that there is a Voice which should silence all other voices, and be heard in all the sweep of its music and all the sweetness of its consolation. Let the child Samuel be a model to all other children. They begin life best who begin it as listeners. Teach your children to listen well, especially in the temple; teach them to cultivate the art of hearing, for in that holy place the voice of the Lord is sounding, and its communications can alone reveal the way of life eternal.

PRAAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, let our weakness be our prayer; let our hunger cry unto thee; let our thirst make known its own supplication. We are weak and weary and sad oftentimes, but the river of God is full of water, and the Cross of Christ rises high amid all the tumult and uproar of time. Thou knowest we need something to look upon; thou hast set up the Cross of thy Son as the object of our attention. We bless thee for the Cross; its head is in heaven, its arms are stretched out to the ends of the earth; there the Saviour is, there is the miracle of love. We know not all the meaning, but we know that we need it all. What sin is only God can know; we know in some little measure: it hurts the soul, it draws a great veil of darkness across the noontide sun, it takes away all the fragrance out of the flowers, it makes life bitter. This we know; this we have tested by manifold experience. The answer of the Cross helps us to overcome all this sinfulness and weariness and all this sense of penalty. May we know the Cross more perfectly, may we draw nearer to it every day; let it be to us the great mystery, the wonder that has no solution we can comprehend, the glory that blinds all other light. Yea, we bless thee again and again in song manifold and ever-increasing for the Cross. Some days we feel our need of it more than others; sometimes we are frivolous and earthly and selfish, and have no need or desire to see the Cross; but sometimes we need it all, and feel our need of it most when we cannot tell it: Lord, help us then to see such degree of the meaning of the Cross as shall help us to believe and live and be glad. As for the fools that would lead us away from the Cross, do thou turn them blind, confound them in their groping and wondering, and when they cry out for help take hold of their hands and bring them home again. As for the wise men that think there is nothing but earth and space and time, may we never be overcome by them, may we hold on to our holy faith that round about us is the spirit-world, above us is God's kind heaven, in front of us an infinite destiny. The Lord fill us with

these holy thoughts and great wonders and solemn aspirations, and the Lord help us to turn our piety into service, so that at eventide, when the shadow lengtheneth and the home-going time has come, we may be called up as servants good and faithful. Amen.

V

IS THERE A MAN ?

THE Bible says, "There is none righteous, no, not one." The Psalmist says he was shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin. The Bible makes no exceptions when it brings against the human race this charge of defection and apostasy. The word "righteous" is a theological word, and therefore we may be able to some extent to elude any appeal that may be founded upon it. We may say we do not understand the word righteous; it is a Bible word, a theologian's word, a preacher's word, a Church word. We never meet it outside in the market-place; we know nothing about it. It may mean something very transcendent and mysterious, but what it means we cannot tell, and we do not trouble ourselves about its meaning. Let us then drop the theological word altogether; let our business be to conduct the argument upon a lower level, and not at all from the theologian's point of view; let us see whether the statement of the Bible is not supported by an immense amount of evidence when we cease to employ the word righteous and take up other terms we meet with every day, and which we cannot pass by on the plea of not understanding them. In this way we may find the Bible to be the most reasonable book. When it does take up its own terms and speak in a language almost unique, that language may be only a variation of our own; under it may be the old rocks, above it may be the old skies.

Were the question, "Is there a righteous man?" the mind would instantly be divided. But the question is not that at the outset; the question is, "Is there an honest man?" Suppose the charge read, "There is not an honest man, no, not one," then we could tackle the assertion, then we should not be encumbered by theological definitions and traditions. That is the question: "Have you ever found an honest man? not partially honest, not honest upon the whole, but honest without qualification or limitation; spiritually, thoroughly, essentially, everlastingly, impeccably honest." Here again we are troubled by a narrow definition: when we speak of honesty the mind will persistently and foolishly limit itself to the idea of stealing money. There are many men who are not rogues so far as money is concerned; they pride themselves up to the point of defiance about their books; they are only too thankful to have their books audited and signed, attested, published. Why this recklessness of honesty? why this vain defiance of audit or scrutiny? That is only one element or section of honesty. Honesty is a wide word and a deep word; it touches every point of life. Are we honest in thought, honest in estimating one another, honest in giving credit to one another in all that belongs to acknowledged excellence? Are we honest in purpose, honest to God? or is our honesty a little marketable commodity by which we advance ourselves from one situation to another?—a scrap of paper on which is written, "Behold an honest man, and give him increase of salary"? That is not honesty, that is investment, that is speculation, that is a calculated arrangement of life, putting all the little pieces so together that you can get across some difficult place. An honest man who can find?

Is there a truthful man? There is none truthful, no,

not one. Brusqueness is not truthfulness ; loud assertion may have nothing to do with the simplicity of veracity. Truth does not relate to lying in the sense of vulgar, blatant falsehood. Many men are false who never tell lies in the ordinary acceptation of that term. Their whole life may be a lie, they may never breathe anything but falsehood ; and yet they could defy the judges of the land to convict them upon the charge of ever having told a lie. Truth is a matter of the inward parts ; truth relates to spirit, purpose, what we would do if we could : and no man knows what he would do if he could. We are the victims of our own ignorance ; we cannot measure ourselves. A man shall say, " I know I should never do that." He may be talking the language of a fool ; the adequate temptation has never assailed him, he has never been locked within the environment which means falling in that particular direction. Truthfulness is a matter of tone as well as a matter of words ; vocal colour may tell a lie without the words themselves being false. What is truth ? That is the old and ever-present and deeply penetrating question. Men laugh lies, shrug lies, attitudinise lies, suggest lies. A man may tell lies to himself. Where is this perfect man who needs no Gospel, no divinity of ministry, no appeal from heaven, no tragic Cross ?

Is there an unselfish man ? Here again we must be quick and penetrating in our definitions. Selfishness does not go in one direction. Some of the most public-spirited men in the world are the most selfish creatures at home. A man may be a noted philanthropist and yet an intolerable grudger of all enjoyment at home. There is a public unselfishness, a grandeur of soul that will propose any proposition, though the heaven be too small a parchment to write it on. There is an unselfishness that will

allow everybody to do just what he pleases provided itself is not interfered with. That is not unselfishness ; that is a thing that keeps its own warm chair, its own snug corner, its own goblet of choice wine ; having given all these conditions, then let everybody do what he pleases. That is vanity, folly, superficial benevolence ; there is no soul of goodness in it, and it must be stripped naked and exposed as a sophism disastrous to all the best reasoning and all the noblest discipline of life.

There is no honest man ; there is no truthful man ; there is no unselfish man : why then boggle at the assertion, " There is none righteous, no, not one " ? A man may be all these things partially—partially honest, partially truthful, partially unselfish : but what do you make of partiality of a practical kind in the market-place ? What do you say about partiality in the school ? what is your opinion of partial good spelling ? Begin the argument there. Spell the word " heaven " and leave one syllable out ; spell your own name without the first letter, without the last, without the middle one : what do you think of such spelling ? And yet it is supposed to be enough if a man be honestish—the *is/z* making him a thief in every hair of his body. What do you say about partialism in the matter of payment of your bills ? A man owes you twenty pounds and offers you twenty pence. Do you say, " Well, in a world like this it is quite satisfactory " ? You will not have partial spelling, partial painting, partial payment, and yet you are willing that a man should live a rough-and-tumble life before God, washing his hands and saying, " That will be enough," when his heart is a den of corruption, a chamber of imagery, a pit of shame.

But why talk of righteous, honest, truthful, unselfish ?

These are terms, qualifications. The better way would be to ask the direct and all-comprehending question, "Is there a MAN?" Do not trouble about the adjective; the adjective may be a mere certificate; the adjective may be a testimonial held in the hand, which can be paid for, arranged for, limited by some form of calculated approach,—"Is there a man?" and the answer from heaven is, "NO." Instead of there being an honest man, there is not a man at all. There has only been one man, the Son of man, the Incarnate God. By "Man" understand God's ideal of humanity, God's thought when he made man in his own image and likeness. Every imperfection is so much deduction from God's ideal of manhood. Where is the man whose head is alive with wisdom, whose heart is all ablaze with love, whose will is a servant of the Lord God Almighty, whose whole purpose in life is without flaw or stain or taint of evil? Where is there a man bodily without ache or pain or infirmity or conscious weakness, without physical reluctance to move in paths of enterprise or even common industry? What of the headache, the heartache; what of the stooping posture, what of the eyes that no longer see the smallest print, what of the ears now deaf to voices whose tones were once daily music, what of trembling limb? Is there a man? Not in God's sense of the term. God is making man, God is creating man, God is conducting the marvellous process of making his own image and likeness. We are partial men, imperfect men, growing men, men undergoing a process: but men in any sense indicative of God's idea of perfectness we are not.

What, then, is wanted? There are many answers to this inquiry, and some of them not altogether what they should be in wisdom, in reach; they fail in depth, in scope, in

outlook. There are many schemes, systems, inventions, answers, which do exceedingly well upon a given scale. Here is a ton weight to be lifted, here is a crane that will lift it: apply the arrangements, put them into right order, turn the wheel, and up goes the ton. Here, on the other hand, is a world to be lifted: now where is the crane? You want something to lift the world and the crane too. You see exactly what men are doing. They think that all social evils and all social difficulties are matters that can be handled mechanically, so every man has his own crane; he says, "This is the thing that will do it: where is the evil?" And he attaches the chain and winds up the wheel, and he finds that the weight is much greater than he had calculated. What Christ proposed to do was to lift the world: now produce the crane. How many mechanical forces have you? Come with your wedges and screws and pulleys and inclined planes,—bring them up, all up: now lift the world! Try a wedge, a lever, a screw; try the inclined plane—that seems like a word that ought to mean something. The thing to be lifted is the world, not a ton of lead; we are not emptying a ship, we are uplifting a world; we are not porters in a great railway warehouse distributing goods over the city, we are in search of a power that will lift city and sea and mountain and the whole world: where is it? The difference between your social theories and inventions and philosophies and nice ideas of bureaux for the amelioration of the human race (and the payment of those who are conducting the process),—the difference between all these and the Gospel is the difference between a crane and gravitation. That is all! Do we, then, abuse the crane? Far from it; we could not do without it. As a mechanical contrivance it is admirable; it saves men and horses and all living powers, and does the work which lies within its scope

easily enough. Do we despise social theories? Not at all. Within given limits they are excellent. But what is to be done is to lift the world; and only gravitation can do that—impalpable, imponderable, invisible, omnipotent gravitation; that creates the worlds, keeps the constellations in their places, watches the heavens and sees that all things move in right order. The falling apple points to the great power that rules and regulates and preserves all things under the dominion of the almightiness of God. A fire will warm a room: what fire will warm the world? You can with a few handfuls of coal make the room so warm that you cannot agreeably remain in it: now will you please to extend your operations and warm the world? It is there they fail; their little schemes are admirable. No house would be comfortable without a coal-cellar. But we do not want to warm a chamber, we want to flood the world with summer: how is that to be done? Light a match, bring out the coals, see what you can do in that direction. So with social theories, new plans, admirable arrangements. They are excellent in their way; not one word is to be said against them within given limits; but when they propose to do the work of the sun, we say they are not only ambitious, they are absurd and profane. Only the sun can warm the world: his smile fills all the space, his touch of heat makes every root feel its own secret and express that secret in green beauty, in tender blossom, or in rich fruit. Nothing can get at man, the life of man, the soul of man, the divinity of man, but God. Yet we are trying to cobble one another up. It is as if by propping a drunken man you could make him sober. If you have only social theories and social inventions, and even what you call an elaborate system of political economy, you will never touch the world in all its vastness and in all its continuity. A

candle will light the shepherd over the snowy ground to his little cot on the hill. Toiling up the hillside he will say : " There is a candle in the little window, set there by kind hands. God bless them ! Now I know where I am. I must make right for that yellow light ; it means home and love and security and welcome." Now put a candle up that will light the ships across the sea. Make a candle on purpose. You are inventive, you are social reformers, you are tremendous in local schemes—invent a candle that will light a vessel across the Atlantic. There you fail ; there you say, " It is not in man to do this." Then you acknowledge there are some things that are not in man ? Be careful how you make the admission, for it may be pressed to disastrous consequences so far as your reasoning is concerned if you ignore the presence and the ministry of the Triune God. Only God can light the flame that shows the ships the way across the changeful billows. There it shines, steadfast, always at home, always saying the same thing, always speaking in light the old, old story. Better go by that north star than by any match that was ever struck by frivolous, self-idolatrous man. This is the whole idea of Christ : he came to save the world. He did not come with some parochial scheme, some local government bill, some new arrangement and adaptation of magistracies and aldermanships, and some new plan of watching the drainage of the city, and receiving a salary for doing nothing ; he came to save the world. The difference between all merely social theories and the Gospel of Christ is the difference between mechanics and gravitation.

VI.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS.

"I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the Church which is at Cenchrea: that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also."—ROM. xvi. 1, 2.

THIS is scarcely the kind of conclusion that one would have expected, judging from the basis and scope of the epistle generally. The letter to the Romans is so conspicuous for elaboration and luminousness of argument, for subtlety and precision in theological definition and statement, and occasionally so rapturously and enchantingly eloquent that we could hardly have anticipated that the whole would have been concluded with multitudinous salutations and benedictions which apparently possess but a local and temporary interest. One would have thought that the rapt Apostle, having been borne to the loftiest circles of devout contemplation, would have flung his inspired pen upon the page he had immortalised, and have retired amid the acclaiming thunder of his own eloquence. Instead of this, he threads his way into many of the minutest details of Christian life, and concludes his unparalleled effort by blessing many who had lightened his toil and wreathed the flowers of friendship around his undeserved and ignominious chain. We dare now approach the Apostle. He comes within the sphere of our vision—

nay, within the sweep of our embrace. While he was pursuing some of the issues of his "great argument," we could but gaze with fearfulness and amazement of spirit. We heard him speak from within the awful gloom of the redeeming crisis, saying, with broken breath, "O the depth!" (Rom. xi. 33); and we have watched him pass into the infinite brightness. Now he speaks friendship's simple and holy word; he walks round among his friends, and throws on each the sunshine of his smile. We may now better see the man; for as you can form a better conception of the magnitude and gentler habits of the eagle while she is supplying her offspring with food than when her broad pinion is dimly visible in the distant heavens, so may you better see the tender affection of the Apostle when he is thanking and blessing his friends than when he is involved in the splendours of the most mysterious visions!

I propose to examine whether these salutations and benedictions are merely of local and temporary interest, or whether they are the expression of principles which should inspire the sentiment and control the action of all time.

I. First of all, I cannot but regard this summary of friendly reminiscences and fraternal salutations as a revelation of the true bond of moral unity. Look at the representative character of the list. You have men and women, old and young, prisoners and freemen, apostles who were of note among their brethren, and persons whose names are lost in obscurity; men of prudence and men of enthusiasm; persons who, for the apostle's sake, had "laid down their own necks." What is the secret of union between such a representative community and the solitary apostle? The all-explaining answer may be given

in a word—love. They cherished a grateful and reverent affection for the most illustrious servant of Christ. Love is the indissoluble bond! Every other tie snaps, but love outlives the storm and is victor in every conflict. Some persons have suggested that Paul was not the most lovable of men. Probably there is some truth in this suggestion, according to the common canons of social estimation. I should say, however, so much the worse for the common canons. What is meant by being a lovable man? Paul was a man who made enemies every day; and I have generally found that the man who is most hated is also the man who is most loved. Such a man always develops an extreme state of feeling. While forty Jews would enter into a vow neither to eat nor drink until they had killed him, Priscilla and Aquila would lay “down their own necks” to save him from a blow. Paul was a man of hard moral fist, and when he used it the report sounded far and wide. Many a time he tied the foxes together, and set fire to their tails. He could not smirk complacently upon everybody and everything. He opposed with vehemence, he entreated with tenderness, he argued with cogency, and suffered with sublimest patience. All great men are many-sided. All great men are extreme. All great men, judged by the Festus-standard, are now and then deemed “mad.” Paul’s was emphatically a multitudinous character: his logic was linked armour; his tears were bright as April showers; his hand smote like a battering-ram, and his heart stood like a wide-open door when human poverty and human ignorance appealed for sympathy. You could not comprehend this man in one day’s acquaintance. He did not publish a full edition of himself every day. He must be much known to be much loved. Hence the affection of this representative community. They had sat with him

by the quiet fireside ; they had seen him in the man-revealing company of little children ; they had heard him thrill the vast assembly ; they had listened to him praying within their own homes ; they had marked him stoop under the doorway of the prison ; they had seen him make Felix quake and turn Agrippa pale ; and the closeness of their acquaintance explained the depth of their affection.

Here is encouragement for all true moral labourers. Your work will bring you love. You may meet with much ingratitude ; some to whom you look for sympathy may pierce your hand like a broken staff. Your heart may be wounded by the serpent's tooth of unthankfulness ; yet if you truly labour with the devoutness of an apostle and the heroism of a martyr, you will come into a large estate of love, and your name will be fragrant throughout the eternal summer of the heavens. You who teach should endeavour to win the respect and confidence of those whom you instruct. By your intellectual vitality, your moral enthusiasm, your indomitable perseverance, you should show yourselves workmen that need not to be ashamed ; and deference will, in due time, blossom into the beauty of affection. Love never faileth. That holy angel shall outlive the eloquence of tongues and the vision of prophecy. Love is forward to pity every infirmity and pardon every confessed mistake and heal every bleeding wound. Love never listens to the gossip of the slanderer or to the carping of the partisan. Love is royal. Love is divine. Let me see love in the Church and love in the school, and I shall be satisfied. Love is not fastidious as to the labour she is required to undertake ; she will hew wood, or blow the trump, or unfurl the banner ; she will watch by the gate, or serve in the

palace, or entreat in the highway ; she is as ready for service at midnight as at noon ; she will betake herself with equal energy to the valley or the mountain. Love will do more for us than genius, or wealth, or prestige. Love will stand as a guardian angel at the portals of the Church, and with the royal authority of heaven forbid the entrance of aught that can mar its harmony or vitiate its holiness. Concerning the institution of which love is the presiding spirit, it may be said, "No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast go up thereon, it shall not be found there. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

II. Not only does this passage reveal the true bond of moral unity, but, by inference, it justifies the employment of both sexes in moral service. You will recall the honourable mention which is made of Phebe, Priscilla, Mary, Persis, and other beloved sisters ; and it is not to be overlooked that they are referred to as directly connected with the evangelistic and ecclesiastical work. They are not spoken of as private individuals, but as servants and labourers and helpers in the cause of Christ. Dwell for a moment on the case of Phebe : hear the lofty eulogiums pronounced by the grateful Apostle : "She hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also." This woman is going to Rome on a Church errand. She was a deaconess in the Church at Cenchrea. The Apostle's testimony concerning her is brief, but full of significance. It is as though he had said : "When the eye sees her it blesses her. Many a widow and many an orphan bless her gentle name. Little children hail her presence as they hail the morning sunshine. Misery dries its eyes when she approaches. She never puts out her hand except to bless and succour the servants of Christ." Of other sisters, too,

Paul speaks with marked recommendation : Priscilla was a "helper in Christ Jesus" ; the beloved Persis "laboured much in the Lord" ; and Mary "bestowed much labour." Thus shall the righteous be had in everlasting remembrance. Wheresoever this Gospel is preached this shall be told of them as the memorial of their saintly affection and saintly sacrifice. You ask me if the Scriptures contain any objection to women preaching ? I answer, "I do not feel quite satisfied that the Scriptures do contain any such objection." If you ask me, personally, whether I object to any woman preaching, I answer, "I never object to any woman doing a good thing." Apart from this question of preaching altogether, there are many services which women can render now as they did in the Apostle's days. There are still many sick to visit, many poor to comfort, many ignorant to teach. There is Church work which a woman can do much better than a man. At the same time, I must teach "the things which become sound doctrine : that the aged women be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things ; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed."

You may see from the manner in which the Apostle mentions the service rendered by all the saints that there was great diversity in their methods of operation. This is brought out with singular clearness. For example, "Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord" ; and, "Salute the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord." Tryphena and Tryphosa may represent either of two very different classes—those who can only do a little, but who do that little with all their heart,

who would gladly spend and be spent for Christ, but who are hedged up with insurmountable difficulties ; or they may represent those half-day teachers who could come both times, but prefer not to do so ; our attendants who only come when the weather is balmy, who regulate their evangelical zeal by the barometer, and who labour spasmodically—now sunny as July, now sullen as November. On the other hand, Persis is always at work ; she can never do enough ; her godly ambition is never satisfied ; she labours much in the Lord !

There is a point of importance here, pertinent to the occasion. It is to be noted that all those persons laboured in the Lord ; they were saints ; their motive was love to Christ. If you ask me whether, in my opinion, unconverted persons should teach in the Sabbath school, I should answer “Teach what ? What is it that the Sabbath school aims to teach ?” If you say that the Sabbath school aims to teach the way of salvation, then I ask, “How can those who do not know the way of salvation teach it ? How can the man who does not know geometry teach geometry ?” In the whole course of Paul’s writing I find no instance in which he asks unconverted men to aid him in his apostolic work. It is argued that many who have begun the work in an unconverted state have themselves found salvation. I know it. I rejoice in it. At the same time, it is but an experiment, and all experiments are attended with more or less risk. Would you engage a dishonest man to teach your children honesty in the hope that by doing so he might himself become conscientious ? Would you engage an unskilled man to teach your children music with the hope that he himself might gain skill through practice ? The school is founded for the benefit of the scholars, and I cannot see how their benefit can be secured

while they are under the instruction of men who themselves have not known Jesus after the spirit, or passed from death unto life. If some teachers have become saved, may not some scholars have been lost? May they not have received wrong ideas of religion? It has been shown to them apart from the bloom and charm and joy which belong to it, for no man shivering on the slopes of Sinai can unfold the sweet mystery and infinite grace of Calvary. Looking at the question in various aspects, I have come to the conclusion that those only who know Christ can teach Christ, and that the school had better be taught by one man who loves Jesus than by a thousand who have only heard of Him by the hearing of the ear.

I look upon this chapter not only as revealing the bond of moral unity and authorising the engagement of both sexes in moral service, but as warranting the exercise of discrimination as to the respective merits of moral labourers. You will observe that the Apostle connects the highest encomium with some names, and mentions others without commendatory remark. In sending salutations to a Church, some would have urged a merely general recognition of service: "Include all under one good wish," they would have said. The Apostle, however, discriminates. As an honest man he entertains different opinions about different people. He loves some, and others he loves very much. In one verse, for example, he names several without any special commendation: "Salute Asyncritus Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them." Imagine the Church assembled to hear this letter read. To one name there is a compliment, to another none! Amplias is "my beloved in the Lord," while not a word is said about Philologus or Julia! Andronicus and Junia are "of note among the apostles";

while Nereus and his sister are coldly mentioned, without a flower being flung to either of them! Apelles is "approved in Christ"; but not a word is said about Olympas! Think what jealousy might have been fired in the Roman breast!—what spite, what envy, what revenge! what rustling and shuffling throughout the assembly! Only grace could overcome the passions under such circumstances. Let us beware of envy. Envy will give us false views of ourselves and of others. Envy will turn the noblest pulpit into a fountain of bitter waters. Envy will eat into the very centre of the heart, and put an end to all growth, all joy, all freedom. As I would warn a child against the tiger's hidden den, so would I warn myself and you against this all-destroying envy.

This text is not to be regarded only as a revelation of the bond of moral unity, and a warrant for the employment of both sexes in moral service, and a standard of moral discrimination, but as also suggesting the true principle of moral consolidation. "Salute one another." That is the secret of consolidated brotherhood! It is not enough to have an outside reputation. There must be an act of introversion; the Church must turn in upon itself and secure strength by concentration.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, do thou send thy Spirit upon us, that we may be delivered from all things evil and brought into sympathy with all things good: we pray for the Holy Spirit. We would no longer walk in the darkness of our own wisdom, we would walk in the light of thy counsels: Holy Spirit, come to us! Thou art the Gift of Christ; he said he would send upon us the Paraclete, who should abide with us and comfort us and lead us into all truth. Thou wilt take of the things of Christ and show them unto us, and under the illumination of thy presence we shall see a light above the brightness of the sun. Dwell with us, never leave us; inspire our thought, our feeling, our speech; make us holy as our Father in heaven is holy; speak to us of the Cross, of the sacrificial blood, of the priesthood of God the Son; and may we run into the sanctuary of the divine love, and abide there when the tempest is loud and when the earth quakes under our feet. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." God is our refuge and strength: may we see that thou art majestic, may we then see that thou art tender; thou art ineffable in majesty, thou art ineffable in tenderness. Fill our souls with thy Gospel; lift us from the dust and carry us away to thyself in all holiness and heavenliness of spirit.

"Descend from heaven, immortal Dove;
Stoop down and bear us on thy wings,
And mount and bear us far above
The reach of all inferior things."

Amen.

VII.

FAITHFULNESS.

“He was a faithful man, and feared God above many.” ~NEH. vii. 2.

NEHEMIAH had built the wall, and wanted some one to take charge of divers civic matters. He appointed a man to that office, and this was the reason of Hanani's appointment : “He was a faithful man, and feared God above many.” Many persons can take charge of a wall after it is built who never could have built it. Many persons are fit for appointments which they never could have created. All this is illustrative of the beautiful economy of God. We are fitted for our places. Why should we complain if some of us are in the foundation, and some of us are in the middle of the building, and some are at the very summit of the edifice ? “Who put us there ?” That is the question. Are we atheists ? If not, why should we complain ? We should like to be at the summit, but the great Architect and Builder has placed us elsewhere ; let us accept our appointment as part of the providence of God. The difficulty is for many Hananis to remember that they did not create the places which they fill. There is a curious disposition in man along this line of thinking and speculation. Having had a great place built for him, the devil tells him that he could have built it for himself ; in fact, the enemy may suggest that in some curious and unknown way he did build it, and may then go on to set fire to his ambition by telling him that if he did not build it he could have built a much better place if he had tried. Why do not men settle down to their work easily, thankfully, enthusiastically, saying : “This is the

work God has given me to do. Perhaps I should have liked some other work, but God knows more about the case than I do; he is saving me from danger, he is educating me along the right line, he knows precisely what discipline I need, he knows what my faculty is and to what that faculty is adapted. The Lord is King; I will accept his appointment, and go at my work heart and soul, for in very truth it is not my work, but God's." Only Nehemiah could build the wall. Nehemiah was an ambidexter; he had two hands and used them. Nearly all men have two hands, but the most of men really use only one. Nehemiah was a builder, Hanani was a watcher: was the one inferior to the other? Perhaps not substantially, not when you come to a clean and complete spiritual analysis of character. So each was different from the other. Nehemiah might have made but a poor watcher, a poor clerk or registrar; but he was unrivalled in building. Hanani might have built a poor wall, but as to watching, superintending, taking care of things, he was a faithful man, and he served God pre-eminently. Take heart, then. You are not a very great man, or God would have given you a very great appointment. Take your estimate from Providence. Many a man thinks he is hiding a light under a bushel when he is doing nothing of the kind. He has little light to hide, and any bushel would be ashamed to cover it. Settle down to your work; be faithful at Jerusalem, and thou shalt see Rome also.

Here is a description of moral character: "He was a faithful man." Not a brilliant man; not a Napoleon for dash, not a Hannibal for pluck—but you could depend upon him. When he said he would do a thing he did it, he did it all, he did rather more than less. Distrust a man who has no conscience. When shall we come to see

that character is the true genius? Moral appreciation is one of the very last things to take place even in a Christian community. What is it that is commonly praised? Seldom goodness, real, genuine uprightness and thoroughness of character. Listen: "How brilliant he is! how clever, how agile, how fecundant in resource, how brilliant in reply, how strategic!—what a great man he is!" All that encomium is not without justice; it has its place in the estimation and appreciation of human character. We must have brilliant men, great leaders, mighty soldiers in peaceful battles; but we want character at the base, we want conscience behind brilliance. Brilliance is a term that may be applied to many policies that are not good. Given goodness at the root, equity at the base, love of justice, sense of honour, devotion to purity,—then we can drink in all the sunshine of brilliance that even God can send upon us. How often it occurs that moral character is spoken of with bated breath! It is not a calculated compliment exactly, reduced to a minimum, yet somehow the tone is hardly quite as round and emphatic when character is being praised as when brilliance is being spoken of—flash, phosphorescence, foam. What is your society without character? How much are you dependent on the men in your office, warehouse, place of business on whom you can always squarely rely! There is rest in such reliance. You do not examine the words, you do not need to read between the lines, for there is nothing to be read; everything is white, transparent, straightforward, obvious, patent. There are no subtleties of thought, no complications of purpose, no intricacies bewildering as thickets and labyrinths. The word means what it said; the yea is yea, the nay is nay. When shall we come to appreciate moral qualities? We are prone to forgive a good deal to brilliant men. Who ever

considers that the defect of brilliance on the part of the good man really does not detract from his solid worth? Is there not a tone in which we say, "Of course he is a good man; we are not saying anything against the man's character"? Why, it is along that line that you ought to be most emphatic. You should say: "He is a good man, right faithful, trusty, and therefore well beloved. You can depend upon his word; his word is his bond. If he says he will do a thing he will do it; if he swear to his hurt he will accomplish his oath." Why are you not more emphatic when you describe moral quality? The Christian critic may be like most of the world; you want to praise something that is simply intellectual, brilliant, dashing, flaming. Do not understand me as depreciating intellectual energy and mental splendour: but we cannot live upon these; we live upon faithfulness. When the great assize is held, and heaven's door is thrown open, the people who enter that door and pass into the summer of God's eternal smile will be called good and faithful. Away with your tricks, inventions, speculations, brilliancies, and see to it that your character, the real manhood, is sound as an oak!—let that be your business, and God will see about the brilliance.

Here is a pre-eminence of piety: "He feared God above many." There are grades in moral attainment. We cannot all be equally good, because we are not all of equal capacity; we cannot all learn the same things, because every man has his gift of God, intellectual as well as physical. Some are great in science, some are great in languages, some are great in philosophy, some are great in theology, some are great in business, some are great in music. And we cannot all be equally great: each man has his appointment, and we have men of note for piety, men

of super-eminence on account of holiness. They stand out on the base of history as upon pedestals made of granite, square, lofty, immovable. Thus: Abraham was "the friend of God." A sweet word, full of music, full of pathos, full of holy suggestion. "The friend of God,"—as if they met on equal terms, as if God were delighted to see Abraham, and Abraham were filled with joy when the Lord drew near to him; friend hailing friend, friend standing with hand locked in the hand of friend. A beautiful picture; a possible reality. Again: "Enoch walked with God,"—as if *pari passu*. See them, the Eternal and the child of a day, walking, walking side by side, together, near enough to whisper, near enough to embrace. Abraham and Enoch not only feared God, but "feared God above many." They were men of note in the Church, our elder brothers, our great ones, the great lofty hills that first caught heaven's baptism of dew. We must aspire in that direction. It is well, in the sense of educational, to have ideal men in society. We must work towards lofty ideals. Nor must we be disheartened because we can never attain them: the ideal will always start again out of the earth; one attainment is the starting-point of another. And thus we proceed from height to height, until we know that heaven is immeasurable, that the understanding of God cannot be searched. Take care that you do not sentimentalise yourselves to death, and take care that you do not play the hypocrite in apparently playing the part of humility. There is a humility that is pestilent. There are people who will not join the Christian community, and they cry over it, and they count their tears to get them some reputation for wonderful goodness. The harlot has gone in and been saved, but they dare not go in; the thief half in hell has been plucked from the fire and sent up into paradise, but these modern hypocrites dare not

say, "Lord, remember me." Take care lest you are making a fool of yourself in the presence of men and angels, and playing the hypocrite under the very eyes of God. If you are out of hell, you may come to the Cross.

In this direction—namely, the direction of moral character—all may excel. Here the moral shows itself to be the universal. The intellectual is the partial; the social belongs to grades and classes of men. Some are born into great estate and much gold, some inherit illustrious names and cannot help it. In all such departments there is speciality, partiality; but along the line of moral character—blessed be God!—the poorest child can be eminent, you can have God's own certificate for faith and goodness. You were born in a garret; you may go to heaven if you obey the laws of divine providence as shown in history, in revelation, and in the Cross. You started life without a friend; you may die amid a multitude of angels. You may never be a genius, you may never write a *Paradise Lost* or a *Paradise Regained* or an *Iliad*,—there you may be nothing and nobody; but as to your character, prayer, love, faithfulness, honour—why, you may belong to the Miltons and the Shakespeares and the Homers of the moral aristocracy. And remember that goodness is the only enduring brilliance. There is a splendour of virtue; that is possible to the least, the lowest soul.

In this direction all the great rewards of life ought to be given. I do not say I would not bury a soldier in Westminster Abbey: there may be soldiers who have done enough to deserve to rot there; but "Peace hath her victories no less renowned than War." I would rather bury a missionary in Westminster Abbey than I would bury a warrior. The time will come when character will go for something; and we shall not elevate a sword, but a

pen; we shall no longer say, "Behold the brilliant general!" we shall say, "Behold the man who by power of prayer has saved the city from ruin!" When your little child comes from school with a certificate that taxes even your parental credulity,—the child has been so brilliant, especially in geography, of which he knows nothing, and in astronomy, which he cannot spell; he has committed to memory the names of five hundred stars,—you welcome the little hero and have a special cake for him and a certificate afterwards. Don't do it; it is all impossible. But when he comes home with a little piece of paper on which is written "Character excellent," then you may give him all the cakes he can eat (the fewer the better, parenthetically speaking). I want you to appreciate goodness, faithfulness. If it could ever be said to you, "This little boy never told a lie," then you may honour him. I am quite willing that he should know the names of all the stars in the whole gallery of heaven, but I would rather that he knew his duty and did it well. Encourage character, encourage purity, encourage honour. If the little creature should ever come to you and tell stories of an evil kind about his schoolfellows, shut him up in the coal-house and forget that he is there. But when you find him true as steel, a real hero in the soul; when you hear that he divided his cake with some poor little wretch on the road, then hug him and love him and embrace him with your whole heart, and say to him in action, if not in words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Now no man can have right character except under Christian motives and Christian influences. "Ye must be born again." "Marvel not that I say unto thee, Ye must be born again." "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved

us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." Make the tree good if you would make the fruit good. Do not rectify the clock by the hands, rectify the machinery within. Not the hand that is set right now and again, but the machinery that itself is right is the real value of the chronometer. Do not try to paint your cheek : renew the blood of your heart, and in due time the heart-blood will write its beauty on the cheek, and men will say, "What health, what bloom of vigour !" Lift up your heads and your hearts, your whole souls, and say, "God helping me, if I cannot have genius, I can have grace ; if I cannot be great, I can be good !" The time is coming when the first shall be last and the last shall be first, and goodness shall be welcomed to heaven.

VIII.

CHRIST'S QUESTIONINGS.

CHRIST was a great question-asker. Oftentimes the questions seemed to be put quite incidentally, so that men scarcely knew to what they were about to commit themselves. Occasionally the questions appeared to be more or less simple and even superficial ; but quite suddenly Christ showed that every question he put came from eternity, and went back to eternity, and was part of the very thought and wisdom of God.

Sometimes the questions were corrective. They were not rebukes in the ordinary and literal sense of the term. Yet occasionally the questions concealed a rebuke quite marvellously, so much so that the man had to open the question, so to say, and find the rebuke for himself. Thus in John xiii. 38 Jesus Christ asked Peter a question, "Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake?" What was there of the nature of rebuke in that inquiry? The Saviour in putting the question simply changed the point of emphasis. Peter had declared that he was ready not only to go to prison, but to go to death for his Master, his Loved One. Jesus Christ, accepting the assurance, changed the emphasis to the word "wilt," and said : "' *Wilt* thou?' Art thou sure? Is this the voice of thine heart? Art thou speaking from the lip or from the soul? 'Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake?'" Jesus Christ knew how

different it is to say a thing and to feel it. He knew well how easy it was to say, "Lord, Lord." That utterance cost nothing ; not one pang of sacrifice was in that simple liturgy. So he said, "'Not every one that saith Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom, but he that doeth'—doeth, doeth ; the man who is always stooping, stooping, stooping ; working, working, working ; trying to do it better next time, and to do more of it : he, even though he fail in his simple literal service, shall go up into the kingdom as by right." Thus the Saviour tests all our professions. He puts them back upon us in the form of his own interrogatory. He does not say to us, "No, you will not," without first giving us the opportunity of saying that we must reconsider the subject. We know not what pause occurred between "Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake?" and the declaration, "The cock shall not crow till thou hast denied me thrice." These questions do not betoken ignorance on his own part. Jesus Christ does not ask for information. When he thrusts the spear of inquiry into our hearts it is that we may the better know ourselves, by reconsidering our positions, weighing again our words, lest by familiarity we may be saying the most solemn things apart from the most solemn emotion. That is one of the mysteries of this service. We may come to do things mechanically ; we may rise and fall and prostrate ourselves as matter of routine ; the soul may be a thousand miles away, drinking out of the golden bowl of its own vanity and ambition at the very moment that the poor bones called the body are bending in lowliest attitude before the unseen throne. Let us put ourselves under the catechism of the Saviour. Let him rake the soul with his questions ; he will do it gently where needful, but his harrow can go deep down into the blood when we need ~~thus to be torn and lacerated.~~

How full of disappointment was the dear life! Day by day the fig-tree was without figs; day by day, summer by summer, the garden was unblessed with a single flower, and there was no fruit in the orchard. Once he told all the tragedy in an inquiry. What it must have cost him to put this question in Luke xviii. 8: "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" As who should say, "Will it all end in disappointment? Shall I find words enough, but no faith; a thousand professions, but no trust; abounding and thundering declarations of loyalty, without any service to attest and confirm the same?" Jesus Christ came to set up a kingdom of faith. It is an invisible kingdom, yet the most active of all the empires; it has hardly any written statutes and laws, but its impulses and inspirations rouse the soul to noblest daring and make it valiant in the presence of the embattled hosts of opposition. Faith conquers the world. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith"; this is the victory of death. Yet we will not have faith; we will have notions, we will have ceremonies, we will have outward and visible signs, but we will not live the faith-life. What man lives it wholly? Some live it in large fractions; some seem to have almost covered the whole space of thought and service by the sovereignty of faith; yet now and again, and once more, there is the self-attesting assurance that we are still in the flesh and still toying with Mammon, sometimes coquetting with the devil. This is our Christian experience. What we want is faith—not credence, not intellectual assent. We are perishing by intellectual power. The devil is killing us by praising our brain-force. What we want is simple, living, loving, constant trust, which is the other word for faith. You will never be saved by knowledge. No man is ever made

wise by information. That is a great mystery in practical education. One would say, "Give a man knowledge of a thousand books, and he will be wise;" whereas it is possible for a man to know ten thousand books, and to be the prince of the fools of the earth. Knowledge is not wisdom. Knowledge ought to be the vestibule opening upon the sanctuary and temple of wisdom; but sometimes we get no further than the porch. What Christ wants is faith. When he finds faith his soul smiles. That worn and weary face of his was hardly ever lighted up into a smile, yet once and again when he saw superior faith there came a light into his voice which showed that he wanted to be glad and that it was in our power to give him joy. Throwing up his arms as it were in ecstasy and rapture he said, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." The choicest flower which he found was not in the garden of the chosen people. Do not say you have faith until you know what faith really is: how deep down it goes, how high up it carries the soul, and what it involves in sacrifice and service. Do you know the pence-table? The child can say it all; it is but a short string of syllables. But a man is not necessarily an honest man because he knows the pence-table. He may know that four farthings are one penny, and never pay the penny; he may know that twelve pence are one shilling, and thus be sound in dogma, but he may keep back the shilling from the man to whom it is due. A man is not necessarily going from one metropolis to another because he knows exactly when the train starts and what the fare is. Upon these dogmas he may be absolutely informed so as to be beyond the power of successful disputation. Saith he, with almost a chuckle of contempt, "The train starts at ten, and the fare is a pound." How sound in dogma! Does that take him to the next

metropolis? Not an inch of the way does it carry him. So, we may have a great deal of Christian knowledge and yet may not have faith; we may make loud professions, and never touch the agony of trust. We are too fond of our feet to fly on the pinions of faith. We do not mind a little levitation. An inch or two off the ground would be an amusement, an entertainment, something to show our wondering and admiring friends: but levitation is not flight. We have the knowledge: How many Persons are there in the Deity? Three. Which is the only inspired book in which Christians believe? The Bible. How are men justified? By faith. How are men sanctified? By God the Holy Ghost. How definite in statement! How crisp in expression! How clear in view! What does it amount to? Nothing. "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"—that living, agonising, inspiring power; that mystery of life, that life at its best, that life which is almost immortality? He does not want the dust of your information, he wants the blood of your faith. At that moment he seemed almost to despair of his own mission.

Sometimes the questions of Christ were most argumentative. They began in little anecdotal recitations. Jesus Christ told a thousand stories, entrancing on account of their intellectual beauty and simplicity. When he began his story-telling even the little children clung around his knees, because little children like little stories. Said he once, "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?" Then all the people looked at him. People in all ages love stories, and you can never kill the dramatic instinct. "A certain man had two sons, and the younger

of them said——” You have your audience now. The moment you leave the story the audience will leave you ; but so long as you keep to that story the sleepiest man in the auditory will want to know what became of the boys. Beware how you admit anything to Jesus ! Said he again, in the same anecdotal and argumentative strain, “What woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it ?” Then he comes in with his “Likewise”—even so. Having lured us into admissions which we cannot deny, because they express daily practical life, he gives them religious applications. We would gladly leave him there, for the soul hates discipline ; but we have admitted so much that we cannot recede. Upon our own common-sense he builds his temple. He is quite willing to take his texts from our behaviour. When we are at our best Jesus himself draws near, and says, “I can continue this, and give it a larger and wider application.” Thus he does. So that if we do anything wisely or well, he says, “That is the beginning of the kingdom of heaven.” He met a shepherd a long way out among the crags, and said, “What seekest thou ?” And the man said, “I seek one sheep that is lost.” Said he : “That is just what I am doing. This little earth has wandered away from God’s fold, and I have come out to find it, and I will not return until I lay it upon my shoulder and go back rejoicing.” The two shepherds were on the same business : all shepherds are. All mothers are on the same business, all healers, all people who take a great grip of life. They mean the same thing, they illustrate themselves by a thousand varying incidents, but the central purpose and the uppermost thought are identical.

Jesus Christ illustrated this cumulative way of question-

putting very strikingly on one occasion. He had his usual story, or anecdote, or dramatic similitude; with these elements of ministry he worked wonders. He was speaking about a boy asking his father for an egg. The boy had said, "Father, give me an egg." And Christ said, "Now which of you fathers would take a scorpion—which when coiled up and asleep is exactly like an egg in shape,—which of you would take that coiled scorpion, and say, 'There, my boy, there is your egg'? Not a soul amongst you. Or if the boy had asked bread would you give him a piece of brown stone shaped like a cut of bread and say, 'There, my boy, you asked for bread, take it'? Not a soul amongst you." Now mark how he comes in with his question: "If ye then, being evil"—infirm, imperfect, foolish—"if ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give the Holy Spirit unto them that ask him?" You cannot get out of that interrogation at any point. God is man infinitised in some aspects. Divine love is human love multiplied by infinity. We cannot do one good thing without being like God. Even when we are atheists and are doing the simplest thing in life faithfully and lovingly, we are like the very God we deny.

Thus Christ brings his great question and his large, solemn doctrine upon us at unexpected points. He could write the Bible out of our own lives; all the Bible he wants is in our own conduct when we are at our best. Read his history and see how true it is that he got nearly all his texts from what he saw the people doing. One poor, poor soul had got a large harvest in; Jesus Christ saw him, listened to him, spake to him, called him "Fool," and then hung up the picture in the academy of the ages, **that** all coming students might peruse and consider and

apply the lesson. He saw one poor vain fool go up twelve inches too far in a wedding-chamber : he pointed him out, and said : " Learn by that man. Presently you will see him brought down. See with what shamefacedness he will come. Never you repeat that trick of vanity." Thus he took up the very stones under our feet and shaped them into living temples, holy parables, bright similitudes. He made such use of them that we could not deny the religious application after having furnished the human instances.

Never were his questions so timely, so delicate as when they were sympathetic. The word " compassion " is the keyword in the life of Christ. The word " sympathy " is the heaven of the Church. Let us hear him when he asks questions sympathetically. Meeting two men one day, they looked dejected ; their faces were worn ; there was no spring in their heavy tread ; they were not like men coming away from a harvest-field loaded with sheaves, the very wain creaking under the golden weight,—they were like men who had been to see the harvest-field, and had found it a heap of stones. Said this Stranger, " What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad ? " We have some kind of right to inquire into sorrow. When men pass us on the road buoyant and laughing, we heed not their mirthfulness ; it does not seem to concern us ; we smile, and for a moment feel the contagion, but the whole thing vanishes like a broken bubble. When you meet trouble you have an unwritten right to say something about it : " Why these tears ? Can I help you to carry your burden ? What is this heart-breaking grief of yours ? " Men in trouble do not stand upon ceremony ; the soul cries inarticulately, dumbly, for sympathy. Help the sharing of great agonies.

We know what came out of that question—the revealed Lord, the proved resurrection. On another occasion he found women weeping, and he said to them, “Why weep ye?” The same law holds good. There is a masonry in sorrow. You can ask a question about misery so as to kill half the pain. “Why weep ye? Whom seek ye? Ye seem to be like women who have come out to gather flowers and can find none. What is this bitterness?” And they told him, and he put one tone into his voice which turned earth into heaven for these weeping women. He is always asking questions about our tears, our sorrows, our difficulties, and our fears. If we do not hear the question, it is because our souls are deaf. The air is full of question-asking. Every angel comes with some inquiry.

Finally, how practical were the questions of Christ. When he went into the market-place he was practical; when he saw all the ways of men he was practical. Once he seemed to see a man who had won everything he attempted to win. All the horses in the world could not drag his prize home. He knew not what to do with it; he could not get his arms around it: it was to his little power infinite in bulk and weight. Jesus Christ looked at him, penetrated the reality of the case, and began an arithmetical calculation in the man's hearing: “‘What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?’ Here is a man who has won the world, and paid his soul for the bargain; what is he profited?” And there was no answer. The calculation had not been made in hell; the whole space of heaven had not scroll enough on which to write the figures that would have answered that inquiry. “What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” or, “What is a man profited if he gain the whole world and lose himself?” That is one of the unanswered questions of history:

so large that nothing can contain it ; so small that no man may miss its presence ; so heart-searching as to spoil a feast ; so cheering as to light up a churchyard with flowers ;—all depends upon the angle of approach, and all depends upon the spirit in which the inquiry is put. If we can answer that we have gained our souls, though we have lost the world, the angels will do the whole arithmetical sum for us. Do not evade Christ ; do not search out for his consolations only, but make him your Teacher, through and through, and ask him in his most disciplinary moods to tell you just what you are. He is a frank Speaker. Sometimes he called a man in high places a “fox” ; sometimes he called men “fools” ; sometimes he called men “blind leaders of the blind.” He will tell you frankly, if you will bring up your soul to the court of Christ, and say : “Saviour, search me with questions. Not only examine me, but cross-examine me ; give me to feel the action of tribulation in the soul, so that thou mayest get out of me all that is in me, even in my most secret thought.” He will tell you just what you are, and you will leave his courthouse a leper white as snow, or a man discharged, but discharged with pardon and blessings. Do not play the fool with yourselves ; do not always be living in the fourteenth chapter of John : “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” Go as well into the judgment chapters. You will never be right until you are right in the soul. And he who can make you right there is the Saviour of the world. Now is the time. Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.

PRAAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, let it please thee through Christ Jesus to lead us away from ourselves, and to fix the attention of our love and our hunger upon our God and Father in heaven. We lose sight of ourselves for a while and gaze upon God. The sight will ennoble us; we shall then return to the market-place and the common road and the daily task with shining faces and glowing hearts. We would see the King in his beauty; we would come by way of the Cross. Didst thou not set up the Cross thyself? Is it not thy Cross, Eternal Father? Behold, from before the foundations of the world the Lamb was slain. We will therefore abide at the Cross; from the Cross we shall see the glory, thy glory, eternal, infinite. Behold, we have heard of thee as the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God: these words we cannot understand, they overpower our mind and heart. But we will remain at the Cross: there is love, and there we find pity and tears and tenderness—the very heart of God going out after the guilt of man. We behold the heavens from the earth, the throne from the Cross; may we see well with the vision of our hearts. To the end that our prayer may be answered, may it first be inspired. Come, Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove! come with the fire and the life and the whole ministry of grace, and lift us up out of our sordid selves into the light and smile of God. We believe in God the Holy Ghost; he is the Comforter, he is the Giver of light; he takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us; he leads us into all truth. Come, Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove! show us the littleness of our life, and yet its greatness; show us that we are here for a moment, but that we are made to dwell with God evermore; show us that through discipline we reach perfectness; teach us that even our suffering is a large part of our spiritual training. “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.” May we look not at the chastening, but at the love, then afterwards we shall have a great

harvest of the peaceable fruits of righteousness. We know we have sinned ; "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us," and we cannot lift up our faces unto heaven. Behold, we have sinned, every one of us, and sinned as if we loved it ; we have not been the victims of sin only, but its willing and rejoicing captives. God be merciful unto us sinners ! The chain is upon our mind and the thrall is upon our hearts ; our feet are fettered and our hands are manacled, and we are delivered over to be the bondsmen of hell. Redeemer, infinite in strength and in tenderness, come to us, and by the power of the Cross deliver us and give us to feel that "where sin abounded grace doth much more abound." Wherein we have begun to be better, help us with all thy strength ; wherein we have stifled one evil passion, God be praised ; wherein we have disappointed one mean ambition, let us see the miracle of grace ; disappoint us, humble us, crush us in the dust ; yea, do thou torture us according to the measure of thy mercy ;—only take not thy Holy Spirit from us ! Help us to abstain from mutual judgment ; give us the large and tender love that thinks no evil ; cleanse our tongue of all poison, lest we speak forbidden words and pronounce unholy judgments. Give us delight in all things lovely ; bring us more and more to see that in Christ is brought to perfectness all the love of God. Give us the listening ear that hears every word that comes from heaven, yea, that hears music at midnight ; and give us the obedient spirit that rises to make prompt and generous reply to every call of God. We thank thee for all that has made us better than we were ; we thank thee for the stone we could not roll away ; we bless thee for the dagger that went right through us ; we thank thee for the spear that was poisoned at the point ; we thank thee for all poverty and pain and humiliation ;—may they conduce to the refinement and strengthening of our best character. Be with the old man as he looks into the grave, and may he not see what he is looking at ; be with the young man who draws up all his programme of life with a hopeful spirit and a daring hand ; be with the man of business, lest he keep his soul in the bank. The Lord be with the afflicted, the overborne, and the sad-hearted, and send upon them the white light, the tender dawn of a new and advancing day. Amen.

IX.

WAITING.

“Their office was to wait on.”—I CHRON. xxiii. 28.

“THEIR office was to wait on the sons of Aaron for the service of the house of the Lord, in the courts, and in the chambers, and in the purifying of all holy things, and the work of the service of the house of God.” The one idea which we separate from all others is that their office was to “wait on,” to serve, to do what they were told to do ; to have masters, teachers, directors, whose beck and bow they would obey, whose lifted hand they would regard as a signal. I wish they lived now ! They are all dead ; no one to wait on now. If there is, he calls himself the last of the old sort. He says you have heard of his kind who lived long ago in the dark ages, and he assures me now that he is the last of his race, and that if I do not treat him well I shall never have another chance of helping a really virtuous and deserving character. Thus he has a little subtle pride, a little subtle self-consciousness, even when describing himself as of the good old sort of servants. What saith the text ? “ Their office ”—all they had to do —“ was to wait on,”—to be ready to be called, to be prepared for service, to do what they were told to do. Would God we could all do that !—the day of twelve hours would instantly shrink into a day of six, and all the six hours would burn with heaven’s light, and there would be no sting in the toil.

“ Their office was to wait on.” But was not that a reversal of nature and reason and justice ? Why should it not have been otherwise ? Perhaps that puzzled and

perplexed the Levites now and then, and they could find no answer to the riddle. But if they were wise men they would never raise the question ; they would accept destiny. Wise pagans did so ; people who did not know there was a Father in the universe felt there was a destiny somewhere, a Destiny with an infinite D ; and they worshipped it, and called upon it, and invoked it, and placated it ; they were not sure whether they moved its iron heart or not, but they felt its tremendous hand. Sometimes the destiny was very good ; sometimes it uttered its commandments with music, and led the way with rhythmic steps. Sometimes that destiny had the spirit of the torturer : he was never pleased but when other people were mad with agony and drowned with tears ; then he ate his cold banquet with a relish. But does not this text destroy the whole fudge of the equality of men ? Yes, that is driven away like so much smoke by a high wind ; but it is smoke we can do without. There is nothing in it of value ; you cannot sell it, you cannot use it ; there is nothing constructive about it, nothing permanent in its quality : let it go ! It is the business of some of us to wait on other men ; a good deal depends upon the other men, whether we accept the position joyously or reproachfully and resentfully. If they are sons of Aaron, we shall not know we are waiting on them. There is a wondrous process of illusion ; some would debase the word into delusion, going on in the education of the mind and the development of human manners. There is a way of so treating men that they shall not feel their inferiority. There is no need to abase a man into some feeling of humiliation. The great fallacy to be got rid of is that there is any humiliation in work. We have wholly misunderstood and misapplied the word ; we had thought that to work for one's bread is a stigma, a brand, something

burned into the reluctant flesh, that we might be known whenever we were seen on the hillsides or on the turnpike road. It is the other people who carry the stigma. There is no stigma in honest endeavour. Whatever it is, settle it in your souls, that the thing itself, being honest, may be honestly, usefully, and even sublimely done. It would be pleasing to assert the complete equality of men but for facts ; these stubborn obstructions will always stand in the road. But all men are equal in a republic? Who told you that lie? In a republic there is a president ; in a republic there is a chief justice. Why, the terms bring in as if by right and as if with some measure of grace this very element of inequality. A chief justice, forsooth ! Are not all men equal? are not all justices equal? And stubborn, inexorable Fact says, "No !" Who fixed the inequality? God. But we do not believe in God. Then, Destiny ! You must have God under some name, I prefer to have him under the gentlest and kindest names ; and as for anything in his ministry which appears to be opposed to gentleness and kindness, I will ask himself to explain these things when I have the opportunity and the disposition. The general ministry is beneficent ; the exceptional cases must be made to fall into it by-and-by.

The Levites might very well have started a preliminary difficulty. Some men are great in the suggestion of initial impossibilities ; they fight the preamble. The Levites might have said, "Who set up the sons of Aaron above us?" The question is, "Are they above you?" If they are, you cannot pull them down ; if you sit up from sunrise to sundown you can have no effect upon them. A man is either superior or he is not superior. If he is superior, it is in vain to rail against his primacy ; by the tremendous pressure of time he overbears and overwhelms all opposition.

If he is not superior in himself, in his thought, in his soul, he will only be on the principal seat as a leaseholder, or as a tenant or occupant at will; he cannot remain long there: only the five-wounded Priest can sit on an everlasting throne. But you say of some men, "There is nothing in them." That sentence is easily pronounced. What is its proof? "Nothing in him" is a very common verdict. What do you mean by "in him"? These words, though so very short, are very ambiguous, and most misleading. "In him" may be a sentence equivalent to much straw put into a sack. There is a good deal in the sack, but it is a good deal of straw. "In him" may be a sentence meaning that he has learned a great many things, committed them to memory; that he has lived upon scrapbooks and miscellaneous quotations all his days, and if he will only open his lips he will give you a quotation from various languages. "In him": I do not call that being in a man; if I so describe it, it is only for momentary and convenient purposes. When I ask what is in a man, I think, "How much fire, force, pentecostal energy?"—his breath is flame. "In him": a column of quotations, a life-sack filled with shavings, with sawdust fallen from another man's timber. Do not call that having anything in you. You may know seventy languages, and never say a word worth hearing in any of them. What we want to know is, "What soul has he? What natural authority, what mandate from heaven, does he hold when he comes to us? Does he come along a low level, or does he stoop down from eternity and tell us the truth in its own mother-tongue?" There may be a good deal in a man that does not belong to him. Only that belongs to you which has become part of your blood.

What was the wise course for these Levites to take? Their

wise course was to recognise a divine appointment. God has set us here to look after the courts and the chambers, and the purification of holy things; God has put into our charge the shewbread, and the fine flour for meat offering, and for the unleavened cakes, and for that which is baked in the pan, and for that which is fried, and for all manner of measure and size. If we recognise the divinity of the appointment, we become happy at once. Just in proportion as we recognise God do we become strong and restful; just in proportion as we ignore God does our life become a nightmare, a tumult, a reversionary perdition. God has distributed to every man according to his will: to one man he has given five talents, to another two, and to another one. Let the man who has only one talent be very thankful he has not five; let him find a reason for rejoicing in the very smallness of his responsibilities. The mountains may be very dignified and sublime, but they catch the snow first: and what the storm was when it was up yonder nobody knows; when it came down here we called it a blizzard, but what did they call it who were first shaken by its violence? Sometimes it is more comfortable to live in the valley than on the mountain-top. Many friends are very fond of the mountains in August: you have never heard them pronounce any opinion about the mountains in January. But the mountains cannot come into the city during the winter months; they have the snow, and they have it all. So it is with the great men that are round about us, leading us, guiding us, inspiring us; they catch the blizzard first.

Remember that each one in life is indispensable. The Queen cannot get her own coals in; but she is Queen of England and Empress of India. There are some things Her Majesty cannot do, simply because she is Her Majesty.

Does she ever go out alone ? And how many things there are which she cannot do that the humblest woman on the face of the earth can do and rejoice to do ! Even majesty has its limitations ; even majesty carries burdens. Those of us who have to serve and wait are indispensable, but we must not think so. The moment we begin to think of the indispensableness and not of the service we become awkward ; not only awkward to others, but awkward to ourselves. They who are discontented have ill bedfellows ; the fellows cannot sleep for them ; the night passes them by in neglect and allows them to turn its darkness into tumultuous day. How sweet to be able to say, " Whatever I am, I am what God made me ! " If sometimes I think I should like twenty-five talents, it is but for a moment ; then I see how much better it is that I have only one. Why quarrel with the one ? If I do not think it enough, why not double it ? That is your way out of the difficulty. There is no one talent that will not admit of duplication. Make a society for your solitary talent by putting that one talent to its best uses ; let it grow, and tell the Lord the tale of the growth when he comes back to claim it. Say, " Lord, thou didst give to me one talent, and I have brushed it and burnished it and used it, and put it out and taken it back, and made such a wonderful work about it that I want two hands now to lift it, for there are two of them, and they are both mine." To " wait on " may be an honour.

I was once in the presence of Dean Stanley in his room at Westminster, when in his own gentle, tender voice he called his manservant " James." I looked at him from one side, and said, " Would God I were your James ! " To be near him, to have to reach him something in the hope that one of his fingers might touch me, that were honour

enough. He was so great, so wise, so magnanimous, so full of charity that he was thought to be latitudinarian. Some people like that long word ; it is equal to a sort of everlasting punishment. "To wait on" : all depends upon the person on whom I wait. What an honour to help some men ! Our business is to remember that our Master is not man, but God. When we are helping or waiting on in the right spirit we are really the servants of Heaven. Look beyond the individual to the Sovereign. When you are doing any work in the Church, do not say you are working for men : you are working for God. When you light the lamp, it is for God ; when you watch the door, it is for God. Do not take your inspiration from any recognition that man may give you. But stand and do your duty in God's grace and in God's strength.

What, then, are the great, permanent, healthy lessons rising out of this, that should go with us in holy companionship through all our lives, and sing to us and counsel us ? The first is that every man has his gift of God. I should like to be a musician, but I am not ; and God said from all eternity, "You are not a musician ; so do not hanker after things you can never reach." I should like to be a painter, and God said, "You were never meant to be a painter, and you would only spoil the brush if you took hold of it, and the brush would be ashamed of you evermore : let it alone." I would like to be—what ? You do not know what you would like to be. Cease the nonsensical talk, and be what God has made you be, and find it out by practice ; and whatever that is, man cannot deprive you of it—it is yours by right divine. But mine is such a humble gift. Do not look at the "humble," look at the "gift." Always beware of qualifying terms. If you notice the history of controversy you

will find that criticism always turns upon epithets ; the substantive is not touched. Men shed blood over adjectives ; it would be a great mercy to the language if they could all be killed outright. I would some Herod might arise with an indignant feeling towards adjectives, and send out men in all directions to cut them down ! The word "gift" is the word you must fix your mind upon ; that is both substantive and adjective. To have a trust for God is the sublime view of human life. I have two angels always with me ; so have you : the one is a black one, and the other lovely with holiness. The black one says : "You ought not to be there, you ought to be yonder ; you are fit for something much better ; you should not be doorkeeper, you should be head of the detective staff of London ; you were never meant to stand sweeping the crossing, you were meant to be one—why—ay, yes—you were meant to be a real downright City man." The black angel says : "Why are you sitting down under this humiliation ? You are a man, ain't you—eh ? Why don't you rise, then ?" And the poor fool rises, and when he gets up he cannot sit down again. He does not know what has happened ; he was told to do this, but told anonymously. Beware of anonymous devils ! The white angel says : "Be glad, O heart of man ! I have seen the darkness roll away, and I have seen men in sevenfold deeper darkness than you are now, and they have come to morning and summer and beauty. Play the man. Resignation is part of your education ; to forbear and restrain yourself is part of your best training. The morning will come. I am in charge of you ; God hath given me in charge of you, to hold you up in my arms, lest at any time you dash your foot against a stone. O child, trust the Bleeding One ! All shall be well with thee. Another great prayer, another tender psalm of thanksgiving,

another upward look : the Lord reigneth." That is God's angel. We know him by the sublimity of his counsel ; and not anonymous is he, for he bears the messages of God, and on God rests the responsibility.

The second great lesson is, that the meanest or smallest is part of the greatest. Sometimes an organist cannot blow his own organ. There he is upon his throne, all his arrangements are made, and he puts his fingers upon the white keys. He might as well have held them up in the air. Why? Because the blower is away. And the blower has some kind of right to say, "The music went well this morning." You may smile upon him, but when he was not there you did not smile. Some of us are but blowers to other men ; but then take the higher view of our office, and how useful may the meanest be! There was a distinguished minister in Manchester, and the chapel-keeper said to him, "When are you going out, Mr. Roby, for your holiday?" "Why?" "Because I wanted to fix my holiday, and it would never do for us both to be out at the same time." The man was right ; that is the true recognition of human responsibility and stewardship. See that you are never both out at the same time, whoever you are. There is no small work, there is no drudgery for God ; there is no secondary place in the Church. What if in the up-summing of all things the first shall be last, and the last shall be first? Let us say with glowing hearts, "Father, put me where thou wilt ; if thou wilt put me, thou wilt sustain me, blessed be thy Name!" Banish the ideas of chance or fortune from your conception of life. God is building the house, God is putting you together, and he will not rest until the topstone be brought on, and you are a completed temple to his praise. Always ask, "What would God have me do?" To find that out

is to find out the whole duty of man. If I am fit for something great, he will send it. Do make room for Providence in your lives! Some men do so much for themselves that they give God no chance; they endeavour to cover the whole area, and God has no foothold in all their acreage. Always ask, "What was the spirit of Christ?" Paul gives answer in his Epistle to the Philippians: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." He went so far down that he began to come up again—exhausted humiliation that he might begin the process of exaltation. We can never obey these great dictates and submit to these overpowering laws, loyally, intelligently, and peacefully, except in the spirit and the power of Christ. That is where Christianity begins its great lesson. I have now endeavoured to outline a scheme of life, and to show that all the appointments of life are under the sovereign direction of God; but having so done, I have done nothing unless I have led the mind to Christ, to learn from him and from his Cross what it is to obey the Father's will and rise to the Father's throne. You never can accept these great principles in your own strength; you may assent to them intellectually, but you do not make them your own sympathetically and usefully until you are crucified with Christ. Out of that crucifixion comes exaltation. What is true greatness? True greatness is to do your duty; true greatness is to do what God would have you do. When you overstrain yourself to do something else, you lose power, you lose dignity, and you fail

of usefulness. Then let us work all together, the strong and the weak, those who are ahead of the rest and those who feebly follow on ; let there be no grumbling, no bearing of malice one toward another, no envying ; " Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice : And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you." You will never get the true *Koinonia*, the true fellowship, the true socialism, until you get into unity, harmony, with the Son of God, who is the Son of man, who is ideal, divine Humanity.

PRAYER.

GOD be merciful unto us sinners ! We have done the things we ought not to have done : God be merciful unto us ! We have left undone the things that we ought to have done : have pity upon us, thou God of mercy ! When we would do good, evil is present with us ; but “ if we confess our sins, thou art faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Lord, hear our words of contrition ; have mercy upon us, thou God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ! We accuse ourselves ; we do not wait for the accuser. We know our own hearts ; our whole lives are lying open before us, so that we read them line by line. We call ourselves offenders against God, breakers of the law, covenant-breakers. “ All we like sheep have gone astray ; we have turned every one to his own way ; ” “ there is none righteous, no, not one.” Yet dost thou cry after us, saying, “ Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die ? ” By many a tender word thou hast assured us of thy loving interest in the smallest, youngest, meanest life. Thou art the Father of the prodigal, and thou dost await his return ; thou dost not keep thine anger for ever, thou dost offer mercy and pardon to the unrighteous man who will forsake his way. We come before thee now to praise thy forbearing love, yet not to trifle with it ; thou couldst smite us with death, yet thy lifted hand is not brought down upon us in destruction. May we know the meaning of thy warnings, and flee to the Cross ; may we hear thy voice, and answer it with all our love. We bless thee that thou hast spared us these many years. Thou dost come to seek fruit upon us ; may we bear fruit to the honour and glory of God. Thou hast given us many opportunities, thou art giving us one at this moment ; may we know it, and answer it, and become better through the grace and pity of God. Spare us a little longer that we may recover our strength, and offer some great utterance of contrition and heartbreak before the Cross of Christ. Thou knowest us altogether. Into thy kind arms, Saviour of the world, we now humbly, hopefully fall. Amen.

X.

FORBEARANCE.

"How long shall I bear with this evil?"—NUM. xiv. 27.

THESE are the inquiries which make the Bible what it is. Not on points of mere criticism, points of mere literary excellence or defect, do I care to build much argument; but on these pathetic heart-inquiries I base for my own comfort and profit the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible. Here is a forbearing God. We have known him under sublime epithets, but they have not moved us. Everlasting, infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent,—all these great words have been applied to God, but they do not move us. They touch our admiration; sometimes they kindle our fancy, and send us poetising and speculating without profit. But when we come to forbearance—power to strike, yet unwillingness to do so; when we come to questions that are full of agony; when we see God disappointed, grieved with us, and yet withholding judgment;—we cannot but feel that the book which reveals such a God is a good book. It loses a good deal by its want of what is vulgarly, but erroneously, called energy. Some people would believe in God if he were storming always: but to forbear, to lift the hand, yet not bring it down in retribution, these are aspects of God that we must grow to appreciate; they are no part of elementary education. We should like violence, noise, overpowering assault and aggression, continual fury; but we grow away from that image and fancy, and are led by many experiences into a tender and large appreciation of forbearance, pity, love, tears—shall we say reverently, self-restraint?—on the part

of God. No other God has been revealed in such terms and aspects. Mythology has created gods, the heathen have peopled the forests with gods, poetry has issued its million deities: God challenges them all to show their quality. They are hideous, powerful, resentful, ambitious, intriguing, everything that is poor and base; but God is gentle, loving, forbearing: he can strike, and will not; he could thunder upon us, and yet he whispers to our hearts. That is not poetry; the man who wrote such testimonies and gospels about God must have lived a deep life. These results cannot be conjectures. The tyrant is swift in judgment because he is wholly without justice and reason. The tyrant says, "Crush them. Why tolerate them for one moment? Make one morning's work of them; shed their blood and put them out of sight, and then resume the festival and the dance." That would be called an energetic administration. It is the administration of violence and unreasonableness, and destitute of that hopefulness which does glory even to the majesty of God.

This tone runs through the Bible. It begins with Genesis; it never ceases. There are those who want to base the revelation or inspiration of God's word upon the life of the historic Christ. I do not; that is the point of consummation. I find Christ in Genesis—I do not wait for Bethlehem; I meet him face to face in Eden. He found himself there when he opened the Bible; he saw nothing in it but himself directly, reflectively, energetically present, subtly suggestive—now there as a great glory, and now as a subtle and impalpable odour, yet always there. This is the Christ-voice asking about the sinner, showing judgment in the form of forbearance. That miracle of words, that miracle of thought! To see judgment leashed, to see power keeping itself at bay, to see

anger in the eyes and yet hear gospels on the lips,—these may be paradoxes in literature, but they are the very essence and unction of the Gospel in fact and in experience.

How is it that the relation of man to God and God to man has always been a relation of controversy? That relation subsists to-day; that relation is exemplified in every single heart. Consider it a moment; it is the most curious, profound, and pathetic of inquiries: "Why has there always been a controversy between the human heart and the divine right?" We do not like to retain God in our thought. What is the reason? We are fruitful in excuses in keeping God out; never, probably, has the human intellect been more fertile than in the invention of excuses for not receiving God into its heart and setting him upon the throne of life. Hear how the medley runs: "We would receive God if we knew him; we would entertain God if we could receive him through the medium of our intelligence; if we were quite sure it was God, we would open the heart-door and bid him welcome to the hospitality of our love; but for doubts and difficulties and perplexities innumerable and unspeakable, we should have no objection to bow down before God in the spirit and attitude of homage." A man can persuade himself that he believes all this: he does not believe a word of it. What, then, is the reason of this exclusion of God from the heart-throne? We know the reason perfectly well: we cannot serve God and Mammon; we cannot love right and do wrong; we cannot really pray. 'Tis that! We send the heart out to seek its proper sustenance in heaven, and then come down and do mean tricks and accept base policies and gratify sordid ambitions,—and all these have a tremendous hold upon us at present; we are in the

body, and therefore we are victimised by things near and tangible. Even philosophy might teach us that there is nothing near and that there is nothing tangible and that there is nothing material; even philosophy, that claims to have no relation to mere theology, has passed its most exquisite and pungent contempt upon things which we have called stupendous and factual. Philosophy has made havoc with these, has taken them all away; philosophy in some instances has not hesitated to say that there is no stone wall. If theology had said that, it would have been discredited; but when the highest and most daring philosophy says that there is nothing visible and nothing tangible, there is no time and no space, why, then we begin to think it is wonderful. The real reason that we do not receive God in the heart is that we cannot have God in the heart and get drunk; we cannot be religious and tell lies; we cannot pray and hurt the weak. And we like to get drunk, we like to practise the mean trick, we like to trample the poor under foot, we like to gratify our passions and our meanness; and therefore we set the mind a-hunting for reasons, excuses, inventions, by which we say with mocking hearts how religious we would be if we could intellectually know God! It is a lie—black, flat, palpable, unpardonable. God is love. If he were to be received into the heart, he would banish all malice, all unforgiveness, all resentment; he would put the fires of anger out, in so far as they were baleful and without reason and justice; he would humble us; he would take away from us all our unworthy ambitions, and set us down to real, hard, honest work. And we do not like it; so we swell ourselves into great importance, and say that we really have no enmity to theology, that if we could but understand God and bring him within measuring distance, we should have no objection. O thou fly!—poor

fly on the wheel! thou who mayest be in thy grave to-morrow, thou wouldst have no objection!—to believe that the universe was not made by chance; thou wouldst have no objection to believe that the centuries which lie upon the fields of duration have been moulded and continued, organised and developed, by an Omnipotent Personality! How condescending is man!

The inquiry, "How long shall I bear?" is not a premature one. It is not asked the first year of a man's existence. God does not ask this question of the little child; he takes up all the little children at once and puts them into heaven. No child is out of heaven. The little three-year-old, four-year-old, that little bud that you left before you could count almost the moments of its blossoming,—all these are in heaven. It is you who are outside. You are fifty years of age and more, or a little less, and God begins to ask how long you are going to continue in the wrong road. He has sent all the stars of heaven to plead with you; all the organised universe is an appeal for order, harmony, proportion, music. He has sent ministers of grace, apostles, prophets, minstrels; he has set up his Cross in the house; he wants to make your very mother the saviour of your soul. It is therefore not a premature inquiry; it is not marked by mere urgency or haste or violence of temper; it comes after a long time—five years, and double the five, and double the ten, and five more, and ten to that; and sometimes it is to an old man that God speaks this inquiry, "Sir, how long, how long?"

No man can satisfactorily answer that inquiry except in one way. The only answer that God wants is surrender. Observe, surrender to whom? Surrender to your Father, surrender to your Maker. This is no mean surrender;

this is the stooping that means exaltation, this the humility that means coronation. This downward way is the upward road, and there is none other. We know why we do not receive God, and we know that we do not tell the real reason in words. How skilled some hearts are in falsehood ! how they can vary the phrases !—yet all the while they are their own severest and justest critics. They would please others by long-sounding explanations ; they would make that intellectual which is moral ; they would try to reason where they ought to be silent and then begin the most elementary form of supplication for pardon. Why do we not speak out the real answer ? We should be so much nearer God if we told the truth. The truth would shame us, burn us in every bone, cover our faces with the redness of unspeakable shame ; but we should be so much nearer God if we called ourselves by our right names—lovers of iniquity, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God ; truce-breakers, covenant-breakers, liars ; men who, made for eternity, have surrendered themselves to the captivity of time.

Is rejection always meant to be permanent ? Probably not. That is another sophism which debases and vitiates our reasoning. We are not going to be permanently without God, then why be without him for one moment ? To think that we may one day need him is to give up the argument. If you ever need him you need him now. Beside, consider the meanness of asking him to come to your hearts when you are getting on towards the end of life. No friend would receive you then ; it would be marked black ingratitude by any friend of yours if you kept him outside your affection for seventy years, and then, when you could do no longer without him, you said, " You may come now." What wonder if he should say,

"No, not now"? He would say so because he is imperfect : God will come at the eleventh hour because he is God. His greatness is the explanation of his love ; his majesty can afford to stoop to the lowest conditions of human need. Every man can testify to the forbearance of God if he will speak the truth. You know when he might have smitten you down. You remember the night all darkness in which he might have set fire to you and burned you and left you a heap of white ashes. You know the day in which you wrought a deed of shame in your private office, and God might then have sent a spear of lightning through your heart, and have left you there a monument and a warning to all who knew the badness of your life. Every man, I repeat, can testify to the forbearing love of God. He can testify the more emphatically in proportion as he has grown in grace. There is a time when the mind makes the broadest distinctions between crime and virtue. But as we grow in mental refinement, as we grow in the power of moral criticism, we care nothing about crime ; we say, "That is vulgar ; that can be done by the ruffians of the age." We take away the word "crime," and put in the finer word, "sin." Then we proceed further and say, "Not overt sin, outward, palpable, shameful sin." We take away that definition and put in mental sin, heart sin, the sin that has gone no further than a thought. How severe we then become with ourselves ! yea, we hunt down the enemy, and before the thought is formed, ere yet it is but a mist of the mind, we see the devil shaping himself in the cloud, and there we hate the offence against God. Thus we testify to the divine forbearance,—not that God has spared the criminal whom the magistrate would not spare, not that God has spared the overt sinner, but that God has spared the heart that has continuously had half-thoughts of evil,

partial intentions of wrongdoing ; that God has lovingly forborne to smite the heart that trembled upon the possibility of thinking one unkind or evil thought. That is refinement of the heart ; that is what is meant by spiritual education—a growing discontent with ourselves because we are not better ; and when that discontent lays hold of us and operates hopefully rather than despairingly, the work of grace has begun in the heart. Have hope of yourselves according to the measure in which you flagellate your own lives. Do not be tempted towards despair, saying, “There can be no hope for one who is so bad—bad not in the hand criminal, bad not in the word audible and critical, but bad in the unspoken thought ;—there can be no hope for one who is stained through and through with this evil and poison.” That is not Gospel talk ; that is not justified by any one word or deed of Christ. We are taught to believe that he is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him. Do not presume upon that “uttermost” that you may aggravate the original offence ; accept it that you may get rid of the accumulating guilt.

The Cross itself is a great question. The Cross says, “How long ?” The Cross says, “Why not now ?” The Cross says, “Why will ye die ?” Behold that Cross standing on Calvary ! It is the interrogation of God. Answer it—answer it now !

PRAAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we thank thee for the morning, its light, its music, its hope, its call to service. We are scattered by the light, we are gathered by the darkness. In the morning we go forth to sow the field, at night we come again to reconstitute the home. May we hear all the voices and ministries thou hast set to work in our lives; may we be no longer deaf. Thou hast sent a Gospel through every wind, a great revelation of love through every flower, and by all the springing of the young year thou hast made the resurrection of the soul possible. We thank thee for all hints and symbols and ordinances and sacraments that point away beyond the time-line into the heavenly secrets, the delightful and unspeakable mystery of thy love. We have come to worship God; we shall be the greater men for doing so: we grow by reverence; we are lifted up to a higher level when we fall down on our faces before God, and say from the heart, broken and contrite, "We have sinned." We thank thee that we have had conviction of sin wrought in us by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit. Sin is the abominable thing which God hates; may we too hate it with our whole heart! Thou knowest we are still in the body and in the wilderness, still under the ministry of the evil spirit who fills the air with blackness and turns the summer noonday into night: he is the prince of the power of the air; we cannot see him, but we feel his malign influence upon our souls. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ so dwell in us with continual enlargement that we shall be able to resist the enemy and overcome him; may we be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; may the word of Christ dwell in us richly, so that when the enemy cometh he may find no place in us. We bless thee for this desire to be larger, purer, nobler; this also cometh forth from the Lord of Hosts, excellent in wisdom, and in understanding not to be found out. We thank thee for all the ministries that help the soul—for little children, for sick men, for the humiliation of weakness which leads us out of ourselves and enables us to look elsewhere, and especially above, for release and

comfort and renewal of strength. We bless thee for many of our losses ; thou hast so sanctified them that the soul is the better for the loss. Oh, thou who dost make bitter pools into sweet waters, help us to believe that thou wilt turn all our sorrows into cherished joys ! Thou knowest the history of the soul ; thou knowest whence we came, through what a lineage of temptation, of sin and failure and blasphemy strangely commingled with irregular hymn and brokenness of heart and contrition and high song of praise—a great mixture and a great wonder ;—and we have come out of it all, these five centuries and more, and we are here to-day representing all the centuries of sin and shame and penitence and growth and failure and hope. Help us to believe that we are not our own, that we are compounded of millions, that every drop of blood coursing through the channels of our body has a history, almost a history of its own. Help us to believe that though we have been exceedingly disabled and blighted and shamed by much in the past, we have all to be comforted and enlightened and blessed and strengthened in consequence of those who have gone before us living lives of sanctity and consecration. May not each heart hear thee now ? “Hast thou not a message for me, even for me also ?” is the sighing of him that is far off. Is there not balm in Gilead ? is there not a Physician there ? Why should these people take home with them their wants and sorrows and discouragements when they might take with them the whole healing of the Cross ? Lord, increase our faith ; then we shall go down to our houses happy in a great justification. We bless thee for thy Church, called out of the world, separated and sanctified. May thy Church be in the world without being of it, may the spirit of grace that is in Christ Jesus suffice for all the needs of the Church, may love be awake, may conscience be alive, may the sense of responsibility be acute,—then shall we at the Cross represent the Church bought with blood, holy, separate from sinners, and independent of those who have no share in our faith. The Lord look upon the whole of the Churches and revive them. They are much overborne by a thousand antagonisms and competitions and bitter rivalries. Surely thy day will come again, thou Son of man, and thy Church shall rule the nations ! Amen.

XI.

THE LAW OF SEPARATION.

“Make a separation between the sanctuary and the profane places.”
—EZEK. xlii. 20.

“PROFANE” does not mean wicked in this antithesis. Perhaps a better reading would be, “Make a separation between the sanctuary and the ordinary place—the common place, the general meeting-ground.” That separation may only be, as it was in this instance, a wall—a wall five hundred reeds long and five hundred broad: a place marked off; on the one side of the wall the sanctuary, on the other side of the wall the open ground. This great law and doctrine of separation runs through the whole range and compass of the Bible. This is not an arbitrary arrangement, this is the expression of a settled—and what we term a necessary—law. Nor is the law unknown amongst ourselves. We daily conduct processes of discrimination, valuation, criticism, appreciation. Pray, therefore, do not regard this wall of separation as something unknown in general human history or even in particular family life. It is the law of commerce, it is the law of building, it is the law of the school. All differences are marked, all values are appreciated and indicated. All places are not equally beautiful; and if all places are in a sense consecrated, yet there are other places that are denominated Holy of Holies. Consecration may be carried up to a still higher point; discrimination may result out of a still clearer and more penetrating criticism and refinement! We ourselves represent this very separation which is falsely supposed to be invidious. We ourselves are

not of equal quality throughout. There are members honourable and dishonourable; some of our members represent weakness, inability to rise to great occasions. The foot is not the head, and the head itself has its moments of variation—sometimes so sleepful as to have hardly one little thought, and sometimes so awake that intellect flames into genius, and genius is sanctified into prayer. It is educational and profitable to remember that this law of separation is a law of universal life, and it includes the Church without excluding any other area of experience or responsibility.

Long ago the Lord said unto his chosen ones, "I have separated you from other people." That separation does not imply invidiousness or favouritism. When God separates one man from another it is that he may give the man who is most favoured an opportunity of helping the man who is least favoured. Genius, power, wealth, distinctiveness of any kind is not a selfish possession; it represents a trusteeship and an obligation. The wonder is that any one can read the Bible and yet believe in moral confusion and in the unimportance of values of character and honours of election and vocation. You should collect into one conspectus all that God has said about his Church, and then tell me if that daughter of the morning should be married to some common creature of the earth. Let us see somewhat of this particular conspectus.

In Psalm lxxxix. 7 the Church is described as "the assembly of the saints." Are not all men saints? No, they are not. By nature "there is none righteous, no, not one"; "all we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way." In Psalm cxi. the Church is referred to as "the assembly of the upright." A moral term, a term appreciative of character. Are not all men

upright in soul? No; we must recognise and properly appreciate that grim and most tragic fact. Some men are upright, and others have no regard for virtue or truth or righteousness or anything that is spiritual, divine. In Isaiah lx. 21 the Church is described as "the branch of my planting, the work of my hands." Something unique, special, jewel-like, with a singular value above all other values. Is this not partiality? It is; it is partiality for goodness, for character. It is not partiality for genius, for anything adventitious and transient, for anything local and petty; that would be invidious, that would be mean. But God never confounds the wheat with the chaff. It is partiality in the sense that he loves the light and not the darkness, the good and not the evil. In Matthew xiii. 24 the Church is described as "the kingdom of heaven." How much we have let that view drop out of sight! We have used this word "heaven" cruelly; we have put it somewhere beyond the grave; we have cut ourselves off from the angel ministries that make the morning bright. Jesus Christ always spoke of heaven as within men, as around men, as the greatest institution known amongst men, as the unseen, invisible, but overcoming power that was to rule the world without trampling on it. He had thus a great gospel, full of majesty, dignity, spiritual mysteriousness, but real, immediate, spiritual expression and power. In Acts xx. 28 we read of "the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Is not that the law of separation, division, discrimination? Is it not written in crimson ink? Can any man mistake that broad red line that fences off the flock of God? In Ephesians ii. 19 the Apostle speaks of the Church as "the household of God." A kingdom, a household,—what majesty! what domesticity! It is the repeated parable of the sun. He himself, the great king

of day, no man may look at with undazzled eyes ; the light that falls from him kisses every little child on the mouth and blesses every little flower with a new gift of life. And in 1 Timothy iii. 15 the Apostle describes the Church as "the Church of the living God." But do not all things belong to the living God? Yes and No. Yes, for there is a universal proprietorship ; No, for there is an electing and discriminating love. Nor does this, so to say, originate with God. If we could so use human language as to be metaphysical and transcendental without being irreverent we should say that righteousness exists before God, and that God is only God in these high moral relations and claims in the degree in which he represents by a necessity we cannot fathom the Spirit of Righteousness. The Law exists before the law. How can that paradox be explained? Thus: the Act of Parliament gathers up an unwritten law, an unwritten sentiment, and gives it location, position, relation, which it must insist upon under penalty. The written Law comes quite late in the development of the universe. We shall write many laws yet ; some laws we shall unwrite and obliterate or remit into the region of obsolescence: but before any great, deep, beneficent, lasting law can be written with ink, it must have existed in the eternal past.

How, then, if the Church be so described and so discriminated, how can the Church connect herself with any merely political, secular, or accidental agencies and supports? The Church is in the world, but not of it ; the Church is a rule within a rule, and beyond a rule and above a rule. We must not confound things that differ. If Constantine had not been converted, would the Roman Empire have remained pagan? Does a man carry an empire with him? When he is converted is he converted

personally or federally? If the monarch of a nation were to become atheistic, would the nation become atheistic also? I have no objection to Constantine being converted, only I believe that he never was converted. It was a sad day in the history of truth when a crowned hypocrisy took the throne of the Church. We believe that the Church must be individualised, that personal regeneration is necessary to real church brotherhood, fellowship, and co-operation. We believe that the Church of Christ is not a branch of the Civil Service; we believe in the uniqueness, singularity, speciality of the institution invisible which is called the Church. The Church is not a quantity you can register upon a piece of paper; the Church is not a pile of wood and stone; the Church is not a self-organised institution, making its own laws and discharging small functions with varying degrees of responsibility on the part of the individual. The Church is a spiritual institution, a spiritual force, invisible, impalpable. It resides within the body called the Church; and as the soul of man is not his body, so the Church of Christ is not a merely human figure or institution. These conceptions may be wrong, but they are our conceptions, and we are bound to be faithful to them; and in being faithful to them we are bound to observe, not an antagonistic, but a distinctly controversial attitude to those who vitally differ from us. I believe it should be possible to conduct a great controversy without unfriendliness, without one word of bitterness, with dignity and forbearance, and in the very spirit of truth-quest, and in the very spirit of the love of the Cross. The mischief is that so many people do not know what controversy is; they think it is hostility, bitterness, mere contentiousness, a vain and conceited desire for verbal and literary triumph. In its best aspects and purposes it is nothing of the kind. It is an emulous

investigation into the very secret and mystery of truth ; and both sides should rejoice when any gleam of light falls upon the vexed question, and each should halt that they may unitedly bless God that a cloud has parted and that the morning has gleamed through it. I can hardly conceive of any exercise more profitable and finally tending to stronger edification than that the heads of all Church organisations should confer with one another, should get to understand one another, should make it a point of honour to realise each other's standing-place or point of view. It is sad beyond all misery that the Church of Christ should be broken up into mere sects and paltry separations and vain bigotries. It must be a satisfaction to any spirit of evil that watches human ways to see one minister of Christ pass another minister of Christ on the open highway without recognition or salutation : such ignoring of one another is the deadliest infidelity. Have not Christian men sufficient restraint, have they not undergone sufficient spiritual culture to enable them to meet and state their case each in his own best and strongest way ? Are there not times when even the highest controversy might well be suspended that all sections of the Church should say, " Let us pray " ? If you want to realise the union of the Church, find the Church at prayer. It would be difficult to tell to what sect any man belongs when he is really in face-to-face communion with God through the Cross of Christ. If, therefore, we find any difficulty, or creeping in upon us any spirit of alienation, when we begin to discuss and to controvert, let us know by that fact that the time has come for us to suspend the verbal warfare and to get to our knees in loving, solicitous, agonising prayer.

This whole idea, therefore, of separation is not an idea

of alienation. We ourselves, as has been said, have this law of separation amongst ourselves. We find it in the distribution of man into body and mind ; we find it in the distribution of our daily engagements into duty and amusement ; we recognise in commercial, political, ecclesiastical life the difference between primacy and secondary ability. One man is great, another man is less ; the bond of brotherhood is not therefore dissevered. He that is greatest amongst you let him be servant of all. Great to serve,—that is honour. Even a republic has a president. You cannot get rid of the king. The idea comes in some form or other ; it means superiority ; official and transient it may be, but there it is,—that is the principle. The kingly idea is the idea of regnancy, supremacy, superiority of some kind or other. And you have the king in the shop, in the bank, in parliament, in art, in the Church, in all departments of life ; so we need not fall foul of the principle of separation, and describe it as preferential and invidious and partial. It is a law by which we live, and without which society could not be conducted as an organised institution. God has his Church. We may all belong to³ it. We are not in the Church because of our peculiar views about Church government ; but we are in the Church, the true and lasting Church, by the obedience of faith that is in Christ Jesus. We may be spiritual members of a spiritual Church without knowing much about mere ecclesiastical difference and colour. The point to be aimed at is this—that we realise each other's membership in a common Saviour, and that we say, "I am but the foot, and not the hand ; I am only the hand, but not the head ; I can hear, but I cannot see ; I can see, but I cannot hear." We belong to one another ; we make up what is wanting in each other's life and capacity and opportunity. We need all men to make humanity ; we need all kinds of spiritual perception

and culture to constitute the spiritual, the ineffable body of Christ. The great difficulty we have as public teachers is to get people to understand something about their principles. The still greater difficulty is to get some people to have any principles at all. "They do not think," saith the Lord. "My people perish for lack of knowledge; my people do not consider." You can lead that kind of life if you please, confusing all distinctions, spiritual, moral, political, theological. That is a wild, useless life; it does nothing for society, it does really nothing for itself. I respect real sincerity wherever I find it. Here is a man who is a sincere member of the Church of Rome: then, "God's blessing rest upon him!" is my heart's desire. Here is a sincere member of what is known as the Established Church of the country: "God's blessing rest upon him!" is also my heart's desire. Here is a soul that believes in the spirituality of the Church, in the power of love, in the efficiency of a sense of responsibility to meet all the claims of the Church; a Nonconformist by conviction as well as by heredity and by training: "May God's blessing rest upon him sevenfold!" is my heart's desire. The only creature that we ought to get rid of is the empty soul that has no convictions, and that confuses, bewilders all moral attributes and all personal responsibility.

I have adopted the theory that the Church of Christ is a spiritual institution, that the Church of Christ ought to support its own ministry, schools, services, missions of every kind whatsoever, without tax, penalty, or political obligation. My belief is that every soul that loves Christ will make the love of Christ his business and everything else his merely daily occupation. This is a great conception; it is not sufficiently estimated and valued. It is a costly conviction, a sacrificial conviction; it is a

conviction or conception that has the Cross of Calvary at its very core. We could be more popular, we could be more fashionable, we could be more broadly and loudly recognised and hailed ; but, having the conviction that religion is a question between the conscience and the living God, and that religion ought never to be made the subject of taxation or penalty, believing that love is equal to every exigency, we must accept the disadvantages of our position and of our conviction, and we must with meekness, yet with dignity, pay the price of our conscientious persuasions.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD OUR FATHER, thou dost lead us in life where thou dost please without consulting us, and we have lived long enough to know that thy way has always been the best. Thou dost lead thy trusting ones to their eternal rest—sometimes up the high hill, sometimes floating down the river, sometimes across the stormy ocean; then through the wilderness, and again through places full of flowers and honey and wine and milk: but the way is all of thy making; it all has meaning in it; it is ours to obey, to follow, to mark the advancing sign, and to arise and pursue it with eager love. If thou wilt create this spirit of obedience and expectancy and devotion, then our love when hard shall be easy, and pain shall be welcome, and things distressing shall turn sweet in their uses. Enable us to rise to the right level of contemplation and to cultivate the right tone of praise, and above all give unto us thy Holy Spirit to overrule and direct and sanctify our whole life. We bless thee that thou hast led us as thou hast done. We have been rebels, but we were wrong; we have been self-willed, and we see what ruin we should have wrought for ourselves. Hear, then, whilst we stand at the Cross, our humble and absolute confession and self-renunciation, and from this hour may we live to serve the Lord alone. Thou knowest what is best for us; thou dost appoint the bounds of our habitation; the stakes of our tabernacle are driven into the earth by the Lord, and the candle of our house is a spark from his own sun. May we then abide in the house of the Lord for ever, and seek the shelter of the sanctuary as men seek refuges from storm or pursuing vengeance; thus shall our life be true to Christ and true to the Lord, and shall be strong in righteousness, tender in pity, all hopeful in Christian charity. Thou hast taught us this desire whilst we have tarried at the Cross. We find all our truest prayers in Jesus Christ. He prayed the prayer before we felt the need; and we do but utter his spirit, yea, almost his words, when we cry unto the Strong that we may be hidden in his strength, and to the Wise that we may abide in the tabernacle of his wisdom. Thou knowest our temptations, our weak-

nesses ; all our infirmities thou knowest one by one, each a plague and each a weakness ; yet they all have meaning in them if so be they are sanctified from on high. We would be thine, but we cannot wholly be so, for there is a law in our members warring eternally against the law of the Spirit ; and the things that we would do we cannot but leave undone. Behold our confession, and have mercy upon us, whilst we fall on our knees at the foot of the Cross of Christ. Give us trust in God and trust in one another. May we as men love the right, pursue with eagerness all that is just and true and beautiful ; and give us that holy love for one another that carries with it rebuke without offence, and reproach that is as an excellent oil : thus we may educate and train and edify one another, until by the ministration of the Holy Spirit we all come to a perfect manhood in Christ Jesus. Speak to the old man that he may become young again ; take up all the little children and give them thy smile, which is an inheritance incorruptible ; to the weakest send some gospel of hope ; to the very poorest send a flower from thy garden ; yea, to all men do thou show thyself, as ever, tender, pitiful, and kind exceedingly. Lay the tip of thy finger, O saving Christ, upon the brow that is burning with fever ; speak thou to those whom no human voice can reach ; and may the dying triumph in their death ! Amen.

XII.

"THINGS NEW AND OLD."

"Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old."—
MATT. xiii. 52.

CAN the same thing be both? Yes. That is the very mystery of true originality. Never believe in anything that is new unless it be old ; never believe in anything old unless it be eternally new. We are not to make a mechanical distribution, setting on one side things fifty years old, and setting on the other side things a week old, and, looking at both, pointing out the difference

between them. Truth is new and old, or it is not truth. There is nothing true that is not as old as God, whether in geometry or in chemistry or in spiritual thought and hope; and there is nothing old that is not as new as the present necessity. The bread was made for this day's hunger, though the wheat was garnered ten thousand centuries ago. The wheat is not the bread, formally and commercially; yet there is no bread without it. You praise uniqueness. Take care! Uniqueness is utterly without value unless it stand upon the pedestal of the commonplace. That is the point where so many people have blundered and fallen and have lost the wisdom of criticism. It is the business of commonplace to prepare the way. The pedestal was meant for the statue. It is a poor thing to see a statue on the ground, on the sanded floor, on the wet grass. The humble pedestal must be prepared for it, to give it elevation, space, dignity. If there be not in everything a great substance of commonplace, the uniqueness is like a green leaf gummed to an iron lamp-post. Seeing the green patch there, you say, "How unique!" Your exclamation is absurd. It is not unique, it is foolish, it is mere eccentricity, it is the trick of some unwise man. Do not call it unique. The unique is the blossom of the commonplace. The unique is a flower growing from soil fed by the very rocks. Your bread was new yesterday or this very morning, but, to recur to the figure, the corn out of which it was made belongs to the granaries of eternity.

Is there a liking for that which is unique in doctrine? It is a mistake. We do not want any unique doctrine. We may cry out for a unique way of putting it, for some new aspect of it; we may want to have all the poetry that is in it rung out in noble appeal, in tuneful chime:

but the thing itself, the truth, is old as God—if it might be spoken reverently, older than any personality can possibly be. We do not want uniqueness in character unless underneath it and explaining it and vindicating it there be a great basis of truth, sense of righteousness, honesty, honourableness, and love: then the uniqueness may be as the accent, then the peculiarity may be but a variety of emphasis; but the thing accentuated or emphasised is no new thing. Love celebrates her birthday every day, because the days all heaped into one accumulation of duration cannot touch the mystery of its eternity. The unique is not something mushroom-like that has sprung up in a night and will perish in a night. The tree is old; the leaf is new. Cold autumnal days shake off the leaves yellow and blackened and juiceless; but the old tree is going to try again, and next spring will be clad in as fine a verdure as any tree that has ever lived. You could not have the new leaf but for the old tree. The leaves are new every summer, but the root—what of the root? In the tree's summer dress you have "things new and old."

Antiquity is the basis of modernness. If there be no antiquity in what you are saying, it is not worth listening to. From everlasting to everlasting is music. Music was not discovered yesterday. There are no new songs. They are only new for commercial purposes. The arrangements and the adaptations are all new and very striking, but the seven old notes celebrated their millionth millennium, squared and cubed into unmentionable sums of years, this morning. This is the sense in which antiquity is the basis of modernness. No man has discovered an eighth or a ninth note. And there be those who are quite content to work with the standard number: they go out into

infinite issues ; they mingle, but never touch ; they are as God's stars, thronging the sky, but not colliding in vulgar contention and mean rivalry.

This leads up to the exhortation to distrust everything that has not a background of eternity. The old is the guarantee of the new ; the new is the blossom of the old. As we have said, time is the little child of eternity.

"Things new and old." Every morning is new because it is a revelation of time, which is old ; and time is a revelation of eternity, which is antiquity summed and glorified. In the morning you find things new and old—a new morning, an old time, like the new leaf and the old root. Are there no new men ? In a sense, there are new men, but Manhood is the root that grew them. Distinguish between men and manhood. A thousand children were born within a scope of mentionable hours, but no new humanity. The child is new and old—new as its own birth, old as the Adam out of which all men came. All children lived in the first man.

So it holds good in high theological applications. What is the old element ? God. What is the new ? Christ. There could have been no Christ if there had been no God ; there could have been no Bethlehem if there were no heaven. Sometimes the secondary is the best proof of the primary. There could have been no great river but for the little rill that rolls amid the mountains or underneath the rocks far away. We do not see God, but we see Christ ; we do not see eternity, we see time ; we never saw to-morrow, we see to-day ; and because there was a yesterday there may be a to-morrow. It is because of the old that we have promise and pledge of the new.

What is the old? Revelation. What is the new? The Bible. The Bible came into the history of literature comparatively recently, but God's speech to the heart of man was from the very moment of man's creation. God no sooner made a man than he began to talk to him. That is the distinction we must always make. Revelation is the eternal quantity, the written book is the new quantity. God's breathing upon man was the beginning of revelation. When man began to write down what he had heard, he had the beginning of the book. The two are one. But you cannot understand the book until you understand something of the genius and the necessity of revelation. Until you get behind the book, and beyond it, and into cycles and epicycles where books were impossible, you cannot understand that the thought of God can be written in the ink of man. That is what is meant by "things new and old."

What is the old? Sacrifice. What is the new? The Cross. Sacrifice began with life; sacrifice is the mystery and may be the glory of life; sacrifice is love made perfect; sacrifice is love at its best. There may have been sacrifice in heaven. To be is to suffer. As for the Cross, it came late in history. Why, men agree that the cross as a structure of wood is not two thousand years old—mean two thousand!—but the sacrifice which it represents is the sacrifice of a Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. But for that earlier oblation there could have been no such death as Christ's on Golgotha. Search into these profound necessities. Remember that eternity throbs in every moment of time, as the sun may glisten in a dewdrop.

What is old? Water. What is new? Wine: a late concoction, a mean device, a trick of commerce, something

suggested by an acquired palate. But old water—who knows the age of fountain, spring, and rill, and wellhead? Who knows the age of the dew? “Hath the rain a father? or who hath begotten the drops of dew?” Ay, sir, that is it. Your wine is new, God’s water is old; and without the water you could not have the wine.

What is old? Bread. What is new? Confectionery. This plain bread is old; this invented cake, this enemy of life, is your new trick. So then, in God’s sanctuary we have things new and old—new because they are old, and old because they can be made new. The oldest of the truths admits of immediate adaptation to the passing necessities of the hour. Let us learn the limits of human knowledge; let us consider that we are all working in a cage; let no man think himself to be something when he is nothing; let no mind put on the airs of omniscience. When a little child says, “God is love,” it says all that the angels have been trying to say since they shone before the throne. A wondrous mystery, quite a culmination of thought and poetry, aspiration, intellectual and spiritual conquest, that we can have in one little sentence a condensation of eternity!

Here is the glory of true preaching. The heart knows the value of the new; its quick “*Nay, nay!*” is a repudiation that is inspired. There is a spirit in man. You cannot feed the soul with the east wind. The soul is no fool. Here is the glory of Christian truth; it is built on reason. The illustration may be represented by many a metaphor. Faith is reason flying: faith is reason in its summertime of blossom and beauty and song. Reason is the pedestal on which the living statue of faith stands by the appointment of God. Hence the peace that comes to the soul in God’s quiet sanctuary. The eternities gather under

the roof of that house. The spirit of revelation is there ; the written book attests the spoken word—the word spoken to the heart in divine breathing and whisper. A great act of prayer executed under the roof of God's dwelling represents an action of necessity. We can never argue with any success either for prayer or against prayer : we have to deal with a fact, a necessity, an act of the soul beyond our origin and barely within our control. We cannot argue about breathing. Who can in sevenfold series of syllogisms prove to you that you breathe? We cannot prove by mere verbal argument that we see. There are actions, conceptions, and possibilities outside of argument occupying a larger range of liberty, older than logic ; just as old as God and love.

These reflections help the soul to rest in an infinite quietness. Let us take what new things God sends us out of his old treasury. When God gives us a truth it is always new. His great speech is, "Behold, I make all things new !" But he makes all things out of himself. The earth is his footstool, and he fashioned it ; he garbs himself with the robe of the stars, and he wove the infinite web. O souls of men, do not run after mere novelty ! Be satisfied with nothing less than eternity. You were made to hold fellowship with the truest antiquity : demand your right society ; assert your claim to your natal brotherhood and your adopted fellowship. In proportion as these great thoughts rule us will we rebuke with scornful reproach and repudiation all schemes that have for their mean ambition the creation of transient novelties. Would God the soul could return to its natural love ! Would God the soul would say : "I must have eternity, I must have God ; I do not want the last-made bubble on the sea, I want to navigate my ship across

the ocean itself, that I may find the tabernacle of him who made it."

What of the young? They must be taught this great doctrine little by little. Nay, so condescending is Christ that he will stoop to make a little story for the young; so gracious is this Master of the Cross that he will wait for the poorest cripple of the camp. If there should be aught of reluctance to follow, he will reason with the soul concerning it; and if any dear little inquirer should say, "Lord, I do not understand all this," he will say, "Then let us sit down on this bank of flowers, and I will put it into a little story for you." Men can understand drama when they cannot understand doctrine; men can perceive and measure the concrete who have no gift of metaphysical or transcendental speculation. So the Lord Jesus hath painted a gallery of pictures: he calls them parables; and when we say, "Lord, we cannot follow thee into all this great, deep, wondrous, infinite thinking," then saith he, "Sit down, and hear me: 'The kingdom of heaven is like unto. . .'"

PRAYER.

FATHER in heaven, we pray that we may in very deed be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication make known our wants unto thee, leaving them in thine own hands, sure that thou wilt make the only wise and good reply ; and in all this matter of prayer we pray first that our will may be as the will of God. This shall be thine answer to us ; we shall be glad, and shall rest in it. Do not answer our ignorance, we humbly pray thee, but answer thine own love and wisdom and power ; then shall our lives be full of light, and all day long we shall sing before the Lord in holy joy. We greatly bless thee, for thou hast greatly blessed us ; if our prayer be great, it is because thy mercies are infinite. Thou hast done great things for us, whereof we are glad ; and we would be glad with exceeding joy, with gladness upon gladness ; we would not give unto the Lord grudgingly, for the Lord hath spared not his bounty in his treatment of our life. What have we that we have not received ? We have nothing that is our own ; we ourselves are bought with a price, we belong unto the Lord ; all souls are thine, as well as the gold and the silver, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. May we know that there is but one Proprietor, may we realise that all things belong unto the Lord ; whether we live, therefore, or die, may we be the Lord's—not by right of ownership only, but by the consent of our own heart, by the seal and covenant of our own answering love. Take us, Lord, wholly ; bind us to thyself, occupy the throne of our love, and rule every thought and desire of our mind and heart : then shall we obey thine own commandment, loving the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. This is the happy life, this is the resurrection life, this the triumph song. We praise thee every day for thy tender care : the very hairs of our head are all numbered ; thou dost watch our steps, thou dost consider us, thou dost dry our tears, thou dost keep our feet from falling and our soul from death. Nor is there any instrument made by man, nor is there any soul sufficient to praise thee with adequate praises for all thy tender care, thy living, loving, redeeming compassion. Thou hast set us in a

wilderness where the devil rules ; we are led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil every opening day : may we face the fact, may we know that this is the time of trial and struggle and effort and disappointment ; it is the way of the wilderness, it is the native tongue of desert places. May we not moan and complain as though thou hadst done harshly with us, for this is our native air ; we are now in the wilderness, and it only ceases to be a wilderness when we have driven off the devil. May we resist the enemy, for he will then flee from us ; and may we know that quite close at hand a white, bright, tender angel is ready to succour us when through thy grace we have banished the tempter. We thank thee for thine exceeding great and precious promises, promises that overflow, promises that are redundant of infinite expression, of ineffable tenderness, all conceived by the mind of thine own love to nourish us and cherish us and sustain us in this school and wilderness period of life. Teach thy children that they are in the wilderness, that they were meant to be in the wilderness, that the wilderness is no strange place in thy providence, but is part of thy plan, that thereby and thus thou dost try the mettle of men and their quality, and test their pith and their powers of endurance, saying when every struggle comes to each struggler, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Help young souls in the battle ; it is often severe. Jesus, thou knowest what sore temptation is, for thou hast felt the same. We have not an high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmity ; thou wast in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. We are in the same wilderness, face to face with the same enemy, struggling with the same seductions and temptations. Oh, may we fight with thy sword and conquer in thy spirit ! Let our lives continue to be precious unto thee, thou who dost redeem them with blood ; and let our houses be places of thy resting, O thou Guest and Host in one, thou who dost make the house a home, and the home a sign and beginning of heaven. If our tears be copious and scalding because of grief and woe and bitter disappointment, the Lord's balm is greater than our suffering. We come therefore to the Cross. God forbid that we should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ ! It elevates all life, it sanctifies all well-borne sorrow, it gives strength in every difficulty and light in all darkness. At that Cross we pray ; at that Cross we leave our sins ; on that Cross is the Victim-Priest who died that we might live. Through his sacrifice we have redemption, release, pardon, and promise of purity. Let the Lord hear the Cross, and answer its pleading love ! Amen.

XIII.

EXCEEDING.

"The exceeding greatness of his power."—EPH. i. 19.

"The exceeding riches of his grace."—EPH. ii. 7.

IT will be profitable to study the place of the word "exceeding" in connexion with all we know of the providence of God and the love of Christ. There is nothing little about the divine economy; there is nothing small and sparing about the hospitality of Jesus. The word "exceeding" is in place when entrusted with some expression of divine love in providence and in grace. There is never just enough, there is always more at the end than there was at the beginning. "The river of God is full of water"; it quenches the thirst of the universe, yet loses no drop of its fulness. This is a contradiction in words, but a blessed and glorious fact in experience. The earth has only been playing at harvests, because we have been playing at prayer. We know nothing yet of the fulness of God, the exceeding fulness of the divine nature, the more-and-moreness of God's resources. Whatever harvest you have seen upon the face of the earth, the earth itself had vitality enough to bring forth thirty times as much. But we did not pray the golden wheat out of the ground; we had some poor, sparse prayer, and we got just wheat enough to live on through the year. "Let the people praise thee, O God, let all the people praise thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase," then shall we see the hills alive with cattle and the whole earth one golden harvest. If we could think ourselves by the help of the Holy Spirit into an adequate conception of the fulness of God's resources, we should as a consequence think ourselves

into rest and peace, into confidence and triumph. We are straitened in ourselves, not in God ; we have limited the Holy One of Israel. Science tells us that every day there is light enough shed from this earth, so to say, off the sides of our little orb, to feed with daylight a whole universe. We catch what we can, and the rest goes to enlighten other darknesses and create other summers, and make other birds sing in other forests.

It is to be noticed that this word "exceeding" is not found once only, it is a word characteristic of the divine bounty. "Exceeding" and "bounty" are words which go together in wedded love, betrothed, united, sanctified in their blessed union. It will be profitable to establish this statement by a reference or two of a Scriptural and historical character. Wherever Jesus is truly thought of the joy is excessive, speechless in eloquence. "When they saw the star, they rejoiced"—after what measure?"—"with exceeding great joy" (Matt. ii. 10). This may be said to be the beginning of this peculiar gladness. They were not only happy, pleasurably excited, interested with more than usual solicitude about happy possibilities ; when they saw the star, it was a kind of emulous joy as to whose hallelujah should be loudest, sweetest. The men had never been so moved before ; it was a new passion ; there was a passion in it of birth and resurrection. In such holy moments we see the bigness of life. It is only now and then that we see what it is to be a man. Time is so customary, engagements so repetitional, and the day's work so burdensome because of its monotony, that many a day we do not know that we are fashioned after the similitude of God : yet now and again there rises in the soul a new emotion ; the soul has seen a star outshining all the galaxies of the lamps of the sky, and the joy is

“exceeding great”—it is religious, it is divine. Ecstasy has its uses ; rapture is the true expositor of a good deal of human experience and divine providence. We cannot bend and shape cold iron, we need the melting flame, the glowing ardour, the pentecostal fire : to such fire there are no impossibilities ; when it seizes the souls of men at Pentecost they talk all languages without knowing any grammar ; they are eloquent without vocables of a merely lexicographical kind. There is a common air, a native tongue, a realisation of all kinships hidden in the folds of eternal Providence ; and all that were Parthians and Medes and dwellers in Mesopotamia, and all over the world, then spake to one another with the familiarity of brotherhood and family unity. Until we too see the star in such degree as shall enable us to “rejoice with exceeding great joy” we shall be dwelling in the lower places of the field, we shall be neat, respectable, idolatrous of propriety, victims of so-called taste. Not until we get into the higher levels and feel the breathing of the finer air, and know what it is to have a spiritual glow in the heart, can we really appreciate the Bible. The Bible is not a mere grammar book, the Bible is not a mere book of words ; it is possible to read the Bible and miss the revelation, possible to utter the words without the music. Let us therefore pray that the Holy Ghost would dwell in us, burn in us as an unconsuming flame, and reveal to us the word written alike on the printed page and on the human heart ; and may he awaken our deepest consciousness, our most hidden selfhood, and bring it into that state of sensitiveness and apprehension and responsiveness that our whole life shall be wholly a sacrament, tender as love that has no memory for wrongs.

Shall we put side by side with this star-gladness the

sorrow that will throw it into vivid and solemn contrast? "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Matt. xxvi. 38). Here is the word "exceeding" once more. It is in its right place; it expresses what never before was realised in human experience. Why this exceeding sorrow? The thieves are not moaning, the sentenced malefactors are laughing with rude merriment; they have been prepared for this wooden gallows, they wait the tap of the gaoler on the thick open door, and they are ready to spring to his application and die like dogs. Why, then, this exceeding sorrow? Was Jesus failing in courage? No. Was he inferior to the thieves in mere contempt of death? No. This was not a mere murder; this was a sacrifice, an atonement, a great priestly act, a conception of sin that darkened the sky and put out the sun. This Man was not afraid of death: he was for the moment loaded with our sins; he bore our sins, he carried our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him; he was wounded for our transgressions. Now I hear the music: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," not because of the cruel cross, but because of infinite sin. He was delivered for our offences, he was raised again for justification; he died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God; and the Captain of our salvation was made perfect through suffering, and the suffering was exceeding, beyond all precedent, solitary, without the help of a parallel. That was the explanation of his exceeding sorrow: he was a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Were ever wounds like his? was ever suffering to be compared to his suffering? All ye that pass by, to Jesus draw nigh, and ask if there ever was sorrow like his.

These are two extreme points—the "star," the "cross"—

each calling for the word "exceeding" to express the consciousness which arose in connexion with these ineffable symbols.

In Matthew v. 20, our dear Saviour uses the same words. "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." He will always have more; he inculcates what may be called the *plus* quantity upon all who would believe him and follow him. He will not have his name used as a decoration; it shall ever be a pledge of sacrifice. "Except your righteousness"—not in amount only, but in quality—all pagan righteousness, all formal righteousness, all righteousness that is of the nature of ceremony and ritual and mechanics—except ye know another righteousness altogether, a spiritual righteousness, a self-consuming righteousness, ye shall not see the kingdom of God: it is there that the qualification for sight resides. We see very little with the intellect; we see nothing with the eyes of the body: we see God through pureness; we read the Bible through broken-heartedness. "What do ye more than others?" is the continual criticism which Christ passes upon those of his people who want to go to heaven cheaply, and who want to show that a deep realisation of religious feeling occasions no pain and entails no sacrifice.

Paul also uses the same word. In Romans vii. 13 He says that sin "might become exceeding sinful." He drives his words as with a whip; he scourges them on to fuller expression, to more energetic posture and accent and emphasis. He will not speak of sin only,—that may be a variable term; but he will have sin become black with sevenfold midnight, darker than all darkness—"exceeding

sinful," sinful multiplied by itself into still larger expressiveness and meaning. So he drives this word "sin" out of the mere intellect into the imagination, the religious fancy, that marvellous power which man possesses of seeing things in their higher lights and vaster applications. He will have us see sin as exceeding sinful, hateful, detestable, intolerable; and not until we take that view of sin do we tread Gethsemane or walk over Calvary with any spiritual profit. The Cross explains the nature of sin, the Cross shows us that sin is not a mere mistake in morals; it is not an accident, a peculiarity of conduct, a self-correcting blunder. Sin is the wounding of God, the hurting of the universe, the shaking of the eternal throne, the involving of moral natures in the very perdition of penalty. The Church has lost her conception of sin, and therefore she wants no Cross. She has lost the resurrection, and she barter for a price that she may give up the Sabbath. When we have got back to the resurrection we shall get back the day of rest.

"The exceeding greatness of his power,"—that is alarming. "Power belongeth unto God." What do we want with power? Power overbears us, power throws an awful shadow across the whole area of our weakness. Paul knew this, and he said in the same letter "the exceeding riches of his grace," favour, pity, tenderness. When mothers are tired God but begins to love; when all physicians and nurses have fallen into sleep because of weariness, the eyes of God slumber not, nor sleep, nor close themselves under the solicitude of fatigue. The Psalmist says, "I have heard that power belongeth unto God"; and then he adds, completing the anthem, "unto thee also, O Lord, belongeth mercy": power in the hands of mercy, omnipotence under the inspiration of tears and pity. A

most holy picture, not to be thrown on canvas, but to be hung up on the walls of the imagination, the richest treasure of the mind-house. Some are brought to God through a sense of power. They are men of high reverence of nature; they get their religion through their awe. Others are brought to God through a sense of his grace and pity and tenderness and love; they are not brought by mere power—sheer, dominating, terrific strength,—but in this way, or in that way, according to temperament, according to spiritual capacity, men are brought, and they realise in their union that there are many lines which focus themselves upon the Cross. If God is powerful, he is exceeding powerful; if God is gracious, he is exceeding gracious. No attribute is any measure of any other attribute. The divine nature is perfect in harmony, perfect in unity; nor need we be made afraid by the omniscience and the almightiness of God. Take me before a judge who knows all, and I am safer in his hands than in the hands of a judge who only knows part of my soul and part of my history. The great Judge can balance me off. He knows the clay in which I grew as a little tender sprout or shrubbling in his infinite forest. He knows where the wind was that blew over my cradle—the cruel, bitter, wolfish east wind; and he says, “Over this little one you must bend with care, pity, and sympathy.” He knows the wealth and the purple and the grandeur within whose environment I was born, and he says, “Where much was given much is expected.” He knows my frame, he remembers that I am dust. He knows that I do things I do not want to do; when I hug the devil I hate him. He knows that when I would do good, evil is present with me. And when he makes up his judgment, his very knowledge, being minute, detailed, complete, will end in mercy and in salvation.

The Apostle says that our light affliction is but for a moment, and it worketh for us "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"—the meaning being, literally, weight upon weight of glory, more upon more, as if God could never give his suffering ones enough of peace and recompense and glory. When the Apostle would encourage us to pray, he says God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think,—another instance in which language limps and fails, another instance in which words and epithets cannot be so arranged as to be formed into a ladder that will scale the heavens. There is a period at which words drop off—poor cripples that can do no more—tired companions that say, "Goodbye! We would go with you, but we are tired. This jungle, this forest, we cannot do with any longer. Goodbye." Then begins the higher companionship, the speechless love, the rest by the way, not in terms controversial, but in music and harmony and anthem and doxology and the very voice of heaven.

See, then, that we trifle no more with the act of praying. Let me hear no more mere mendicants' prayers; let there be no more cataloguing of petitions. Get into communion, into rapture. You are coming to a King, you may bring with you large petitions. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." "Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." We are challenged to great praying, and God is pledged to great answering.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, help us to pray always, and not to faint. Who can pray always but by the power of the Holy Spirit? Thou knowest our frame, thou rememberest that we are dust. We are soon tired, we soon fall into forgetful slumber: but if thou wilt send upon us the baptism of the Holy Ghost, we shall look unto the hills whence cometh our help, and we shall not be disappointed. Thou hast been merciful unto us with unspeakable tenderness; our very sin seems to have drawn thee closer to us; we had not known thy love but for our sin. We set up the Cross. Jesus was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him. Help us to see thy love in the Cross of Christ; help us there also to see thy righteousness, thy law, thy majesty, but especially may we see—for we need it most, we need it all—the pity of the Eternal Heart. We thank thee for what we have seen of thy goodness in our life. But our life is running away like a cloud chased by the wind; our days are a few; old age is upon us ere we are quite aware of it, and the grave is dug at our feet whilst we are yet talking of things to be done in life. But thou canst comfort us with a hope which nothing can extinguish, not even the cloud, not even death itself, nor the grave; thou canst so cause us to lift up our eyes unto heaven as not to see the tomb. Fill us with a sense of immortality; assure us that being in thy Son we cannot die: thus may we triumph over death and mock the spirit of the grave. Help us to live so constantly in thy love, and to be so sure of thy blessing, that we may be able to say always, “The bitterness of death is past; we part to meet again; we are interrupted in our song but for a little while, then shall come the reunion and the everlasting Sabbath.” Help us meanwhile to do our duty bravely, with simplicity of heart, nobleness and generosity of motive, and may we be accounted amongst those who are faithful and just servants, working out the Lord’s stewardship with all patience, fidelity, and care. Hast thou made our eyes for weeping, or for vision of

light and beauty? Yet thou dost strengthen our vision by our tears; thou hast enabled us to see more through our tears than we can see without them: help us, therefore, to accept thy chastisement with bowed heads, with loyal hearts, saying within ourselves, if we are not strong enough to say it in loud song, "Good is the will of the Lord." Save us from all narrow views, from all limited conceptions, from everything that is of the nature of spiritual poverty and feebleness, and give us that farsightedness which sees the things that are yet to come, which sees heaven open and the Son of man seated on the right hand of God: and thus in great spiritual power may we walk through all the way of time. Cleanse our hearts of all selfishness, all deceit, all vanity and worldly folly. Help us to hold what we have with a light hand, saying, "It is not ours, but the Lord's, and we are stewards of the Most High." Make us generous in feeling, noble in judgment, pitiful in spirit, helpful in all service, and to be and to do all this because of the Cross of Christ. We bless thee most for the Cross when our sin is heaviest upon us; then we cry from the heart, saying, each for himself, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Jesus died for me: "Other refuge have I none; hangs my helpless soul on thee." And to this cry thou wilt send a whole harvest of peace and blessing and joy. Be within our houses: if they are great, make them glorious by thy presence; if they are small, make them the dwelling-place of the Most High, and therefore ample enough for the soul's dwelling-place. If we are in trouble, dry our tears; if we are tired because of the length of the way and the heat of the noontide, give us rest awhile that we be not overpowered; if we are in anxiety, in strife of mind, in difficulty concerning this life, the Lord send upon us the all-illuminating and all-releasing Spirit. Be with dear ones everywhere,—with those who are in peril on the sea; with our friends who have gone to the colonies and distant lands to do an honest day's work that they may eat an honest loaf: be with all who are in peculiar circumstances of trial for which there are no words; if any have been seized with a fatal malady, the Lord send a double portion of his Spirit, that the bodily disease may be forgotten in the fulness of divine triumph. The Lord thus comfort us one and all; rebuke us not in his displeasure, but smile upon us with his ineffable favour, whilst we linger at the Cross. Amen.

XIV.

PRAYING ALWAYS.

“Will he always call upon God?”—JOB xxvii. 10.

IN the first instance, place the emphasis upon the word “always.” Job is mocking the hypocrite ; he says in effect : “He is praying now ; it suits him now to pray. He wants assistance, he is in difficulty, he is seeking to increase his social reputation, he has an object in praying at this moment. But will he always pray ? Is this a religious fit, a momentary spasm, an occasional and transitory piety ? He is on his knees at this moment ; I see that attitude, I know it well, I have seen hypocrisy in all its guises and postures, and I simply ask this one penetrating question, ‘Will the hypocrite always pray?’ He may be cursing to-morrow morning ; there is no reliance to be placed upon hypocrisy. Hypocrisy prays when it suits hypocrisy to pray ; but hypocrisy has no backbone, no stamina, no real, abiding, lasting, staying quality of soul. The light of the hypocrite is not solar, it is a little candle beam ; and the candle of the hypocrite shall be put out.” But we may turn the question upon the Christian as well as Job turned it upon the hypocrite. We must remember that the enemy is taunting us with the same inquiry. The devil said even concerning this self-same Job, “Doth Job fear God for nought ?” Look at his right hand, it is full of gold ; look at his left hand, it is full of silver ; look at his house, every chamber is a banqueting-room ; look at his fields, they are white and alive with flocks : but put forth thine hand now and touch him, and touch all that he hath, and this same praying Job will curse thee to thy face. So the devil’s estimate of Job was not one whit better than

Job's estimate of the hypocrite. Let us therefore turn the inquiry sharply upon ourselves, never minding the hypocrite. We may lose ourselves whilst we are thinking about other people. Let us subject our souls to rigid cross-examination, that we may know in how far we are only occasional suppliants—suppliants of God when we want to get something from him or be released from intolerable pain.

Let us place the emphasis upon the word "always." There is a cadence in that word, subtle as music and full of spiritual suggestion. Some men win by continuance, by patient continuance in well-doing. Some men succeed thus in commerce; other men succeed thus in study, in literature. They are not gifted with that flashing genius which goes across creation at one bound: they are blessed with the genius of perseverance; they steadily work on; they are good at continuance, at these exercises which we call by the name of "always." They will win. You would have won if you had been blessed with the spirit of persistence; but you never kept at anything more than two or three days, and because of your want of simple continuance you are what you are. The law applies to commerce, and to study, and to spiritual culture and the whole idea of religious fellowship and growth. You have seen men who began life with you apparently with advantages which you did not possess. Sometimes perhaps you were a little inclined to say, "God hath dealt sparingly with me, and bountifully with my friend." How does the case stand now? You have discovered that you were entrusted with the talent of persistence, continuance, patient perseverance; you never did anything by some master-stroke, you have done everything by a thousand little strokes. You thought how grand a thing

it was to shiver the rock with one blow ! That was mere romance. By blow upon blow, by repercussion, you have laid the granite wall before you in two huge pieces. If the rule apply to commerce, and the rule apply to literature, as it does, why should it not apply to religion ? How many men have begun a thousand books, how few have ever finished one volume ! The men who have opened a thousand books and read half a dozen pages of each are not readers ; the man who has taken up one solid work and made it his own is a man of real, solid, useful information upon the subject which he has thus studied. The book is not in the first page, not in the middle page, not in the last page ; the book is in the book, the whole book. Sometimes we speak about mutilating a hymn. I do not know who authorised us to use that word "mutilation" in connexion with the omission of a verse or two ; it is an absurd word. But, apart from that altogether, every time we read the Bible we mutilate it ; and if we mutilate the Bible every time we read it, there can be no great sin in so-calledly mutilating a hymn now and then. You never read the whole Bible ; you say, " Let us read chapter——" That is not reading the Bible, that is mutilating the Bible ; reading a part of the Bible, leaving out the most of the Bible. Have you read the Bible ? I have never met any man who has read the Bible, yet I have met a thousand men who have read it through. But to read the Bible means to master it, to know it, to be able to identify it, to bring all its parts to bear upon one another, and thus to mould out of these scattered glories a whole firmament of stars. Let us, therefore, insist upon a very simple rule—namely, that persistence in commerce is essential to success, persistence in literature is essential to thorough education : therefore it is not improbable that persistence in prayer, in religious study, should be essential to the completion of

fellowship with God. Occasional prayers do the soul no good. We have not an occasional solar system, we have not occasional gravitation. Amid all the changes even of climate the air abides ; amid all the fluctuation and apocalypse of clouds the sun still rules. So in our religious life, it is not occasional attendance at church, it is not occasional reading of the Bible, it is not occasional prayer that can be expected to end in any great and lasting results : only by faithfulness in that which is small, by regularity, by doing it again and again, only by line upon line, and precept upon precept,—only so can you really and profitably advance in anything that is worthy of your attention. This ought to be a word of encouragement to some, because they have desired to proceed by leaps and bounds. They would draw upon their sinewy limbs the seven-leagued boots and be off at a wild pace. This is not God's law. Men cannot go by running. Running is occasional, leaping is opposed to the law of gravitation. No man has a right to leap except as a merely passing exercise or a display of athletic skill : but the jumper breaks the law of harmony. No man has a right to be two feet up in the air ; nor can he keep there more than a moment—nature is against him. Walking is part of the solar system. Not, therefore, by running and by leaping and by spiritual athletics can you attain this prize of real consciousness and lasting fellowship with God, but by walking, by taking the simplicity of nature as your rule and inspiration. I believe in persistence. I have faith in the great doctrine of keeping at it. "What," you say, "is that man still living?" Yes, and is as busy as ever ; you cannot keep him down. If he lived by leaping up in the air you would soon destroy him ; but he walks, and is not weary. Obey nature. You must obey gravitation, why not obey the gravitation that is spiritual, and move and

have your being in the great action which we call the life of God?

We may now change the point of view, and say, "Will he always call upon God, especially when God seems to be wholly against him?" That is the time to try faith, love, trust in God. What is God doing for you? The vulgar mind says: "You pray to God for deliverance, and deliverance does not come, and you are crushed under the wheel. What has God done for you?" It is the question of a mean mind. God does a thousand things for the soul that do not admit of being represented in such poor words as release, deliverance, triumph. Of triumph there are many kinds and qualities. What did Jesus do for Stephen when Stephen called upon him when he was being stoned to death? Jesus enabled Stephen to say, "Father, lay not this sin to their charge"—a miracle of grace! That is never wrought in any soul by human philosophy, by scholastic rules: this is nothing else than the gift of God, the very miracle of the Holy Ghost. There are times, and we have all passed through them, when prayer does not seem to be doing us any immediate good. The mother prayed that the little child might not be taken away, and yet the husbandman came and snapped off the bud and took it to heaven. The mother prayed that she might be the child's nurse and teacher for some twenty years at least, so that the child might get well upon its feet; and ere the child knew his mother the mother was taken to heaven. We know these are sad things, we feel sometimes as if they ought not to be; but there they are, and they would be there if there were no Bible. The Bible does not make them, the Bible recognises these things, provides for them, shows how they may be sanctified, and thus offers its ministry as the supreme educational factor in the world.

There have been souls that have prayed in winter without feeling the cold or the snow ; there have been hearts that have poured themselves out in minor music of supplication and confidence when there was not a coal in the grate or a crust in the cupboard ; there have been souls that you could not strangle at the altar, though you heaped upon them all the objections of infidelity, all the discoveries of men who have explored and discovered and inquired in every accessible region of human effort and intelligence. You have stoned these men at the altar, and the more cruelly you have stoned them the more eloquently they have prayed. Sometimes there comes to be this question in life, "Which shall be the stronger—the temptation not to pray, or the power to continue calling upon God?" Who has not been in that agony? Who has not been sometimes almost on the point of letting his religion go? Who has not felt in his soul the horrible impulse to say: "Away with it! Let me eat and drink and be merry; and if there is a hell, let me go to it"? These are hours of the soul's madness. Better times have come, quieter thoughts have prevailed, and the soul has said, "Though he slay me,—and he has almost slain me now. There is only one more little fibre to be cut; if that should be cut, I am a dead soul; but until it is cut, and I hope after it is cut, I will put my trust in him." If it were a question of one day of twenty-four hours, this might be foolish reasoning, but when a man is truly in God he says, "There are no days." The word "days" is a convenient invention for the purpose of marking off the succession of events. There are no hours, no days; there is only one eternity, and until that is developed who shall say that God is ignorant or God is unkind? You must measure Providence by the scale of God.

In this continuance there will not be any monotony.

The age is getting afraid of what it terms monotonousness. What an appetite some people have for variety! If ever I fall into a despondent mood about the age it is when I see people that cannot be content with patiently going on with daily duty. They must be on the hill to-day, on the sea to-morrow, in the city the following day; they must have drums and trumpets and dances, a banquet every night, a festival every midday, and see some new person every hour. Then that is called enjoyment. That will be the ruin of any country. We cannot live upon these liqueurs; we can only truly thrive on water, the fountain of living water. God has not made one drop of wine, but he has so filled the fountains that time can never exhaust them. God has made no confectionery, but he is the great bread-maker; he makes plain bread, and calls it the staff of life. You can inflict no greater injury on your child than to give that child to expect that it must have one unfailing succession of variety and entertainment and excitement. Teach the child that continuance, persistence, regularity, evenness is the true key of lasting quietude and tranquillity. Yet in this matter of religious continuance what variety is possible! We began as young souls; then how we thundered at the gate of heaven! Our prayers were excited, violent. Then, as we passed into middle life, our prayers were lowered a little in their tone, but not in their quality; we began to see the difference that marks things off from one another. Then old age came upon our father, and he bowed down to pray,—hear that muffled voice, once young and ardent and resonant, then quieter and calmer and more discriminating in tone. And now old age talks at heaven's altar. Is there any lack of quality? On the contrary, there is an increase of it: but how different the manner, what a marvellous change in the scope of

the petitions, what colour in every tone, what measured life in every movement of the speech! That is the kind of variety we want; not a variety of foam, but a variety that indicates progress in life, enrichment of experience, and ever-deepening confidence in God.

I will bear this testimony—only the man who prays always knows what prayer is. Many persons will try to seduce you from the altar; they will tell you that they have prayed. Ask them how often, ask them under what circumstances, and they have prayed occasionally. Occasional prayer is blasphemy; occasional prayer is impious irony. Talk of occasional breathing, but do not talk of occasional praying! For such praying is not prayer; it is an attitude, it is a speech, it is an exercise of the bodily kind which profiteth nothing. Prayer is the atmosphere of the soul; it is the soul's soul. When, therefore, you consider the subject of prayer, consult only those who have prayed always; and they will tell you that along the line of prayer there are great hills and dark valleys, and down those hills there come sudden squalls of assault and temptation and difficulty and contempt and scorn, and in those dark, dank valleys there are beasts of prey that would set their teeth through your souls if they could. Yet they will tell you that to pray always is really to pray; and only when prayer has become the habit and atmosphere of the soul can the soul testify to its energy and to its utility. No man is qualified to write upon prayer who does not himself pray. If that rule could be obeyed we should have considerably less infidel literature upon the question. Do not consult the blind man as to the colour you shall put upon your walls; do not ask the deaf man to give a judgment about music: why then should you ask the dead, prayerless soul to tell you what it thinks

about supplicating the mercy of God? You make yourselves wise, and in a certain degree you are wise, by consulting experts upon difficult subjects. You consult experts in commerce, you consult experts in law, you consult experts in every class and division of life ; and you are right, because you want to have the best judgment you can upon the question under discussion : why then will you not consult what I may term, for the sake of convenience, experts in these religious matters, the men who have borne the burden and heat of the day? Ask them what they think of prayer. But to consult an unbeliever as to the value, necessity, and utility of prayer is to consult a blind man on the composition and beauty of the rainbow.

PRAYER.

WE would cry out and shout unto thee, thou Living One, because of the abundance of thy love. It is larger than the waves of the sea. There are no words for the love of God: it passeth understanding, it passeth all speech; the height, the depth, the breadth no man can measure. God is love; God is pitiful, tender, abounding in kindness, in mercy, and in tears. The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad, and our gladness cannot be silent. We praise thee, we worship thee, we acknowledge thee to be the Lord; all the earth doth worship thee, thou Father everlasting! We live because thou livest; because thy compassions fail not we are not consumed. How shall we exalt thy Name? With what word or song shall we praise the Living One? Blessed be thy Name for ever and ever. And we would call upon our souls to bless thee and forget not all thy benefits, thou who dost make gifts unto us day by day. Thou only knowest what our life is, and what our life can do, and what our life shall be in the days that have not yet come. We would rest in the Lord and wait for him lovingly, patiently, knowing though his chariot be delayed, according to our poor reckoning, yet it is making all the haste of love. May we stand in God's grace, may we rest our aching heads upon the promises of God; when the darkness comes may it show us all the stars. We love God because he first loved us. How thou hast trained us little by little, until we have come to some degree of strength! Thou didst call for obedience, thou didst set up thy commandments round about us, and write thy statutes in our hearts that we might not sin against thee; then thou didst lead us onward to Bethlehem and to the mount of beatitudes, and through all the loving, living parables of our Blessed One, and thence to the Cross. Then thou didst from a risen Saviour pour out upon us the Holy Ghost. In that age we now live; the air is full of God, the wind is living music, all events are writing over again in a new language the revelation of God, and amidst all the old sinning earth goes forward to a new and eternal summer. Thou knowest our

life, our purpose, our highest vow, our most secret desire. Oh, come to us according to our condition and minister unto us out of the fulness of thy grace! Send none unblessed away; give to every heart some flower from heaven's garden; put into the memory of every heart some tender word, some snatch of song, some look of love that shall make all the week bright and glad. Teach us thy will, O Lord. "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?" is the cry of every heart. Show every man what thou dost expect of him; may each work in his own way, and all be found at last to have added to the building of the Lord's kingdom amongst men. Show light where light is needed, whether on the understanding or on the affections and the conscience. Be very gentle with all thy pitifulness to those who are as the bruised reed and the smoking flax. Many honourable men are in sadness; many honest souls have lost the day, and even at noontide they are stumbling in the darkness. And some are beyond our poor prayers—callous, laughing the devil's laugh in their mean hearts at God's altar and God's day. We cannot include them in our prayers,—yet may we not once more include them, saying, "Spare them, Lord, this day also, till another hymn, and another speech to heaven, and another entreaty shall be given to them"? And mayhap in the evening the angels will say, "Behold, they pray." Comfort thine own people; make them glad; save them from all cold and fog and misery of doubt, and may they rest in the Lord, and find his sanctuary a place of refuge that cannot be violated. Read thy promises to our hearts with thine own voice; then we shall get all their meaning. Spare us a little longer: the work we have done is so poor, so little; we want to enrich and enlarge it. Lord, one more year, or ten, spare us, that we may do at least something more to reveal the kingdom of Christ to the eyes of men! Pity the trouble of the world; pity its heartache. Oh, thou knowest where the haunts of trouble are; thou knowest where Misery dries her tear-red eyes in silence and in despair! Thou knowest all shattered lives, all downcast souls. The earth is full of trouble. Saviour, Man of the Cross, atoning Priest, oh, multiply thy grace, and thy light, and thy love, till Misery expire and Death itself shall die! Saviour, the earth is thine; now red with thy blood it shall yet bloom with thy love and bring forth abundant fruit to the honour and the glory of God. Send thy helpful spirit to all good men, all true and honest preachers, teachers, and helpers of thy kingdom, and may this day, day of rest, be full of that business which brings quiet into the soul. Amen.

XV

TECHNICAL OBEDIENCE.

"Thou knowest the commandments" —MARK x. 19.

THOU knowest the alphabet. The alphabet was meant to be put together into words, and the words into sentences, and the sentences into music. And the young man said, "Lord, all these have I kept from my youth up." Christ said: "No: you have kept the alphabet, but you have not got into the music. An alphabet will do you no good. You may have it upon every wall in the house; but unless it be further used, unless it be wisely handled, it will come to nothing. The alphabet is a series of loose letters." "Lord, what is the music of it all?" "Sell all thou hast and give unto the poor. That is the reading, that is the music." "But I have kept all the commandments." "No: you have only kept the loose letters, the consonants and the vowels; you know each of them well—no man could displace one by another and deceive you. But you have not got into the literature, into the eloquence, into the music." All the ten commandments were meant to grow the great flower or the great tree of Beneficence. We must have the commandments; we must have some rough and initial outline of morals; we must at all events be told what *not* to do; there must break upon our attention the voice which by its very quality begets confidence, saying, "Thou shalt," "Thou shalt not." That is something to begin with. The commandments are the very least things you can do. "Do not steal." "Lord, the command is itself a dishonour, a suspicion that I cannot tolerate: to tell me not to steal!" Yet we must begin there; there we must all

begin. High and mighty as we are in a rough kind of superficial honesty, we must all begin with—not stealing. And who has begun there? The preacher must answer for himself, and the hearer must make his own reply. Thieving—oh, it is so subtle! It comes in upon you so suddenly; you take without knowing it, without intending it, and, behold, at night when you audit the accounts of the day how much the most honest man, as he thinks himself, has stolen!

You have heard of the necessities of life. What are they? Write down in a series the necessities of life: clothing, bread, plain bread, water, pure water, a chair to sit upon, a poor bed on which to lie, some roof overhead to keep out the weather. That is the list. Very good. Now these commandments are the necessities of the upper life, nothing more—the very barest things you can do with. You could not do with one line less. Look carefully at this whole series. Take the matter bodily. For the body we must have clothing, we must have bread, we must have water. We do not need cake, wine, confection, condiment; we must have bread and a drink of water from the well. That is just elementary morality in its physical aspect and as represented by this code called the Ten Commandments. No man could live outside these commandments and have any life at all worth living. Take it educationally: what do you mean by the necessities of life from an educational point of view? Foreign languages? No. The higher mathematics? No. Go down to the necessities of intellectual education. Reading? Yes. Writing? Yes. A little power of adding up figures? Yes. Fractions? No. Decimals? No—possibly, and by-and-by, but decimals are not necessities of intellectual education. Every child should be taught

to read and write and add up a few figures. These are the necessities, the alphabet, the lines without which we cannot move at all. So is it with the Ten Commandments. They are the clothing, the bread and water, and reading and writing, and elementary calculation of morals. If you have not kept the commandments you have done nothing, you have not begun. But who can keep a commandment? There you raise a greater question. Let us first keep it in the letter, and then advance to keep it in its metaphysic. Do not let us palter away our time and befool ourselves by making morality into a metaphysic passing intellectual imagination, and because passing intellectual fancy giving us an opportunity of doing all kinds of shady and questionable things under the mean pretence that if we understood the metaphysics we would obey the practical part of the divine code. We cannot have any metaphysicians, therefore, here around the altar, saying what they would do if they understood more, if they could penetrate to the very soul of the Christian ethic, if they could only see the very essential meaning of the divine morality. Away! It is a lie! If you will not do the little you do know, I cannot trust you to do the great and the immeasurable which you never can know.

Commandments are nothing without the spirit of obedience. Truthfulness is larger than truth. The want to pray is the prevalent prayer. You know human nature enough to know what I mean by the paradox that we can obey in a spirit of disobedience. Can that truth find its way into the inmost recesses of our mind and heart? We may keep a commandment in the letter and break it in the spirit; we may do it without wanting to do it; our obedience may be spoiled by our reluctance. We may give without giving; our grudging spoils our benevolence

We may be in the church, and yet a thousand miles away from it. What Christ wants is spiritual obedience. What is spiritual obedience? It is the larger interpretation of the commandments, and a full assent and consent to all they say and to all they would say if they could. "Thou shalt not kill." "Lord, such an idea never entered my soul; why say to me, 'Thou shalt not kill'?" Have I shown any signs of wishing to kill? am I a murderer *in posse*? Why, I shrink from the very sight of red blood. 'Thou shalt not kill.' My Lord, it is toward some other man thou must look when thou dost forbid murder." Yet it would be a false interpretation. Every man is a murderer; every soul kills. We are not vulgar criminals, we shed no blood, we leave no stains behind us that cannot be obliterated; yet we may be killing souls, killing hearts, killing hopes, killing confidences, killing Christ all the day. We have only kept the commandments when we have kept them lovingly, sympathetically, joyfully.

This shows us the great negative work which Christianity has to do. This work can never be reported in statistics; this work can never be made really evident to your own consciousness. All progress is an undoing of the past to a very large extent. Every Act of Parliament displaces or amends some other Act. You have much to unlearn. I have often to say to my soul, "You have begun at the wrong point; all your calculation is vitiated by an initial mistake; you started wrong." Then the question arises how to get rid of all this superabundance of useless and mischievous material; how to get rid of all these prejudices. When was ever a man fully dispossessed of a prejudice? He has formed an opinion, and he is reasoned out of it, and driven out of it, and shamed out of it, and burned out of it; and at night he says, "On the

whole, I still think that I was not so far wrong." That is God's difficulty with us—to get prejudices out of us. By prejudices I mean pre-judgments that are false judgments, opinions that rest on no true reasoning and no complete view of righteousness. This has possible applications to some sorts of illegitimate orthodoxy. A man has heard a certain series of words always in the same enumeration, and unless he can hear the same words, in the same series, in the same succession, he thinks he has not heard their truth at all. Truth is larger than language. Truth admits of infinite aspect and expression ; and we should be so much in sympathy with the spirit of truth that we shall know it under all conditions, detect it even under the most skilful disguises. How to come to God with a little child's heart that has no writing upon it, no conclusions, and no theologies, and no orthodoxies at all—a sweet, human, beautiful, white heart that seems to say to God : " Now write on me just what you want to have written. I do not want to write anything myself because I am very foolish, but write on the white tablet of my heart all that it is needful for me here and now to know." Where is that white heart ? Where is that child-spirit ? Yet without it we can make no progress in the school of Christ. Perhaps you are now in the midst of this negative work : toil on. Perhaps you are now giving up certain habits : that is very good—persevere. You had a habit of drinking : you are struggling against that—good. You had a habit of indolence, and are making heroic efforts against laziness. And once you were given up to the almost constant utterance of profane language, and now you are struggling to get rid of that uncleanness of tongue : good. But when all that is done you have only done something that you may begin to do the real

thing. You have cleared away much rubbish, you have got rid of much that was offensive and hindering. Now, having cleared the ground, what follows? Building, edification, putting life together into shapely form—yea, massing it into a very temple and sanctuary for the indwelling and inshining of God.

Respectability is not holiness. A man might suppose himself to be respectable who kept the commandments. Respectability is the great difficulty of Christ; he can make no progress amongst respectable people. Respectability is killing the Church, stamping out enthusiasm, forbidding the children to shout and to sing. Respectability is piety preserved in ice. We must get rid of self-sufficiency, self-contentment, and self-idolatry. There is a new definition of holiness: it is now some kind of assent and consent to our own best instincts; it is now interpreted to be some kind of homage to the seen and the unseen good. No! or the Bible is a lie, or Christ has died in vain, or the Holy Ghost is a nightmare of the religious imagination. What! holiness some honour to our own instincts? I do not want any rootless flowers. Here is a flower that has no root, and never had any root; let me see it. I will hold it in the hot sun awhile: where is it? A drop of molten wax on the floor. Our own self-begotten holiness is a waxen flower. Men love flowers, and put them under shades and preserve them. My friends, these flowers never grew in the sun; they never knew the breath of fresh air; they are not heaven's children. Do not be beguiled by the latest definition of holiness, though it be by a skilled hand and a capacious and energetic mind. If holiness be some higher translation of ourselves by ourselves, then the Bible must give way; it can have no place in religious teaching. But the great heart-broken world

will not receive your new definitions. The people are after all to a large extent the true guides in all matters of the ripest and largest orthodoxy. The people—God bless the people!—have turned away from your hollow definitions and philosophical idealisings, and have said, “Who will show us any good?” To tell certain men that holiness consists in a certain kind of adoration of the seen and the unseen good, is either to increase their despair or show your own superficiality and insincerity. I will still therefore believe the dear Saviour. He seemed to know me better than any other man. From every interview with him I go home saying, “Come, see a man that told me all that ever I did : is not this the Christ?” I was trying to grow grapes by myself, and he found me and said, “Except the branch abide in the vine, it cannot bear fruit.” That was my mistake. I thought I could grow holiness without any root, and the Lord said to me so tenderly, in a sisterly-motherly tone, not so much of remonstrance as of gentle instruction, “Except the branch abide in the vine, it cannot bear fruit”; and I said: “Dear Jesus, Saviour of the world, I see I was wrong; I wanted to do without roots, and without astronomic forces, and without the chymic action of the air and the light and the dew. Lord Jesus, graft me into the life-giving, root-bearing Vine; then I will have rest.” The philosophy was right; the reason was sublime; the result was vital. The worst heterodoxy I have ever heard is the heterodoxy that wants to supplant the Bible and the whole Christian idea of character by telling men that the whole thing can be done by obedience to their own reason and their own instincts. The Bible says, “There is none righteous, no, not one.” If our very instincts have fallen, how can they raise the edifice which has shared in the great apostasy? If our reason has lost its reason, how can it teach the infinite philosophy

of right, truth, music, God? I take my stand by Christ's conception of life. It is, after all, even after the last *Review*, the sweetest, cleanest, largest, grandest, tenderest revelation and gospel that ever soothed this poor, wounded, bleeding, dying heart.

What is the best proof that the commandments were not sufficient in themselves? The best proof of the insufficiency of the commandments was the coming of Christ himself. Why did he come if the Ten could lead us to final righteousness and ultimate heaven? The Incarnation is the best answer to this practical heterodoxy. There stands the living, entreating, atoning Christ, who says, "Without me ye can do nothing." "Why, Lord, without thee, then, I cannot keep a commandment." And saith he, "That is true; you could keep the Commandments in a rough and external way, but not in their spirit, not in their poetry, not in their divinest quality and force." "Can I not do some good deed without thee, Lord?" And he answereth me: "No; there is no good deed possible apart from the Vine. I am the Vine, ye are the branches; my Father is the husbandman." "Is that the real view of the upper and best life, Jesus, Son of man?" Hear his answer: "Yes. We stand on that—the root, the stem, the branch, the relation to foundations, and the highest actions of creation, mechanic, chymic, actinic, spiritual." "But, Lord, can I not make a flower without thee?" "Oh, yes." "How?" "With wax." "Will it live?" "Not a day." "Will it be the means of bringing into existence other flowers?" "Never." All these mean definitions of holiness ignore roots, causes, far-away ministries and operations. The man that says he will make his own flowers when he could have an abundance in the garden insults the sun. He does not insult the poor gardener working for his day's hire; he slaps the sun in the face. He is a fool.

PRAYER.

“OUR Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name !” Thy Name is thyself : thou art the I AM. We are of yesterday, and know nothing. The Lord seeth the end from the beginning ; his dwelling is in eternity ; he sitteth upon the circle of the earth ; all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. We rejoice in this, and in this we tremble. Thou knowest the best of us as well as the worst ; thou seest us through and through ; thou knowest not only our conduct, but our motive, and thou knowest the impulses which we may not name aloud even in our own hearing. Thou wilt judge us in mercy ; thou wilt remember that we are dust. Thou dost not overcharge and overburden any of thy creatures ; the insect carries its own little weight of sunshine ; and all things thou hast meted out according to thine own line, thou measuring One, setting all thy universe in order like a householder. The bounds of our habitation are fixed ; thou dost determine our income, thou dost build the house we are to occupy. Thou knowest all things, and thou wilt do all things according to thy will ; and whilst we suppose ourselves to be doing part, we shall see in the long-run that except the Lord hath built the life-city we have laboured in vain. We are thy workmanship, we are built in the image and likeness of God ; thou wilt perfect us until we become as a cathedral in which all thy praise shall evermore be sung. How good is the Lord, how great his hand ! When he openeth it the whole earth doth blossom with flowers. Thou turnest away thy face, and it is sudden night ; thou dost return to us, and the sky cannot hold all the light. Thou hast done great things for us, whereof we are glad. Our health is thine, and our reason,—that wondrous god-like judgment and thought that searches into origin and motive and purpose and final end ; and all this wondrous frame is thine, not one blood-drop is our own. Behold, thou hast set our eyes in our head, and our ears thou dost fill with morning music. We are thine, yet we knew it not, and when we knew it we forgot it. God be merciful unto us sinners ! Thou dost love us even in our

wallowing corruption. The pit is not too black for thee to come into, thou Saviour of souls. The Cross is deeper than the pit, and the head of that Cross reaches unto heaven, and its great arms go out after the prodigal and stretch a mile beyond his wandering. Come to us, Jesus of Nazareth! We are blind: Lord, that we may receive our sight! is our cry. We are leprous: Lord, that we may be clean! is the crying agony of our hearts. Pity us, help us, cleanse us in the fountain opened for sin; give us daily sustenance, daily succour, daily encouragement. We soon fall back from the light; the first temptation despoils our heaven. Never leave us, never forsake us; feed us, feed our infant life. Guide us in all our way. How foolish we are and ignorant before God we know right well. We cannot sometimes tell the right hand from the left; we judge by the appearance: so we make poor reckoning and come out of the controversy of life mean and woebegone and self-disgusted. If thou wilt undertake everything for us, every line of every letter, and every word of every speech, and every thought before it becomes a word; if thou wilt be patient for us and take us up as our only Friend;—behold, in the outcome there shall be light, and when the darkness comes on, it will only come to reveal the stars. Wilt thou look after all our affairs? wilt thou watch all the house, the nursery, and the sick-chamber and the life that is in it? Wilt thou appoint the angel of sleep to come nightly to the bedchamber? Wilt thou look after all our little life and make a garden of it, a flower-garden and a fruit-garden? Thou canst work this miracle for us. We would put ourselves into thy great gentle hands, then nothing can befall us that will give us more than a moment's pain. How hard of heart we are thou knowest, how unkind, how selfish, how self-remembering and self-considering. Thou knowest it all. We are thy problem, thou hast the answer. Come to us, thou Three-One, and pour through our hearts the cleansing river, and make us feel that we can do all things through Christ, God the Son, which strengtheneth us. Spoil every bad man's speculation; turn away those who would come and steal out of the vineyard of God; set thy dogs upon them that have evil purposes in the sanctuary, and may they be beaten and devoured until they learn to pray. The Lord be on the sea as on the earth, and make the great sea as a floor of crystal. The Lord be with our loved ones in the forest, in the backwoods of the colony, in the gold-fields, in the sheep-runs. Be with all honest and despondent souls that want to make bread and cannot get any; and as for those that make a speculation of charity, bring them to swift disappointment, and may the more they eat be a case with them of the more they hunger. The Lord take up all the little children into his

arms, and in that embrace they shall know one another and love one another evermore. Hear us, our Father-Mother; hear us at the Saviour's Cross. Amen.

XVI.

“SON, REMEMBER.”

“But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.”—LUKE xvi. 25.

FROM this text is often preached a discourse upon memory in hell. According to the parable in which the text occurs, the rich man died and was buried, and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment. He asked Abraham to send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool his scorching tongue. Abraham said, “Son, remember.” With that aspect of the case I have nothing to do at this time. My purpose is to elicit a great principle, applicable to men upon earth, applicable in our present state of personal and social development. The Lord said, “My people doth not consider”; and again, “My people perish for lack of knowledge.” To “consider” is to set things down together; to set them, as it were, in a row and look at them, great and small, peculiar and ordinary; and from the whole of them some practical inference, helpful in the education of life, is to be drawn. We shall then deal with a subject of present-day interest. There will be no need to project the imagination into some future state of being, and to conceive of persons there recalling all the incidents of life's tragedy. Let us recall them now; let us attend to what I may call this sacrament of remembrance or consideration; let us go through

some processes of induction—that is, of putting all things together, and seeing what we may learn from them in their unity. The text is appropriate to such a spiritual exercise. "Son, remember": call to mind, consider, put this and that together; look at the whole space of life, so far as it is at present revealed, and thou wilt see that Providence has been writing its name across the whole disc of life.

Why should men complain? The answer to their complaint may often be, "Son, remember:" This complaining is irrational, it is ungrateful, it is offensive to every sense of right and justice and truth and beauty. "Son, see; call things to memory. If you get into great difficulties in consequence of your belief or disbelief, 'Son, remember.' You had your chance, and you chose your God. You did it, you wanted to do it; you said you were a free man and would exercise the franchise of freedom, and none should deprive you of it. Very good; but why this complaining now? You have no right to complain; you took away that right when you made your choice. If you had been forced in any direction you might reasonably have complained of the degree of force which was brought to bear upon you, but you chose your own God, you kissed the lips of your own elected Baal, you threw your arms around the infinite hideousness, and said, 'Thou shalt be my God.' So be it. You are a free man: but why complain now? Why this prayer from the bowels of hell? You cannot have everything! You cannot both be an idolater and a worshipper of the true God at the same time. You made your choice; why not say to this burning memory, this self-accusing voice: 'This is my own doing. I sowed the seed, and now I am reaping the harvest; I will not complain. I have always been a

rationalist ; I have always thought that a man ought to take the guidance of his own reason and work out his own way in life. I have done mine, and here I am, burning, scorching, tormented, disappointed, stung through and through. Never mind, I will kiss my wounds and call them medals of honour. This is thy work, proud Reason. On this harvest I must feast for ever.' That would be manly ; there would be a heroic touch in that. But why this whining, why this houndlike moan ? You had your choice ; you took it : " Son, remember."

If men want reason, they must have it. You gave yourself up to what you call nature ; so be it. You could have given yourself up to faith, but you did not. You said you would spend your Sabbaths in the fields, and you called them the " green fields," though in many a case you had to supply the green. You said you preferred to follow the law and the course of nature : very good. Is nature always kind ? Is she an ever-smiling mother ? Has she no rod at home ? Is she dear nature, sweet nature, loving nature ? Can she ever be awkward ? You are moaning because you have no harvest ; but why should you have a harvest ? " Son, remember " : you sowed no seed, you had no seedtime ; once you almost went out to sow seed, but you consulted the wind, and he who consults the wind sows no seed. But you are a worshipper of nature, kind nature, loving nature ! She will certainly grow you a harvest, though you do not trust her with your seed. Will she ? She has her laws, her rods, her penal settlements, her frowns. " Son, remember " : you have come to old age, and you have nothing in the locker ; but, " Son, remember " : you never worked for anything ; you were a lazy, self-considering, indolent man, who supposed that kind nature would do all that

was necessary ; and your mother abandoned you ! Why this complaining ? You believe in the laws of nature ; accept them. Why is this man groaning on this side the stream ? He is complaining as if some one had wronged him. “What is thy complaint, thou sorrowing one ?” And he saith, “Because I am not at the other side. I was an hour too late for the tide, and I could not get over.” Yet you believe in nature, the laws of nature ; you speak of their continuity ; you stand aghast at august nature. Why were you an hour late ? Nature was not an hour late ; nature was here at the time, and you were not here, and therefore you cannot avail yourself of the resources and the facilities of nature. “Son, remember.” Don’t blame nature ; nature would have taken you up and carried you across, but you were not to the fore when you were wanted. And the fact is about you that you have always been just one hour late. You know it. That is how you came to miss the train so often, and then you blamed the train. I never heard you blame yourself. You have been an ill-used creature, the tide was unkind to you, and the train was unkind to you, and the post was unkind to you ; and there you are, and now you are dependent upon the look and the gift of charity. “Son, remember.” Moreover, you cannot disobey the laws of health, your own chosen nature, your own chosen God, without being punished. Nature has her hell. You thought that “hell” was a theological term. Not it : it is a commercial term ; a term in nature ; a term in practical conduct. A man puts himself in hell. You neglected every law of health, and now you are a complaining sufferer. But why the complaining ? That is the point. You have your own God, your own nature ; you do not worship, you do not obey, even in your own elected temple : then why the complaint ? If you had

been a disciplinarian in the matter of health you might have been a strong man to-day, but you neglected the discipline and yet expected the health to be enjoyed ; and now you are calling to somebody to come, and a voice answers your fool's prayer, "Son, remember" : consider, think.

Turning away altogether from these applications of the solemn doctrine, we might walk along another line of life and find how suitably it can be applied in all directions. Whilst we are mourning the loss of some things, we should remember the presence of others. "Now, what have I to remember?" each man should say to himself. When he puts down upon a long sheet of paper all that he needs, is that enough? When he has finished the long black list of poverties, necessities, disappointments, and the like, a voice says, "Son, remember." Remember what? Remember the other side: what have you had? what have you now? There is a *per contra* to this list, and you must write it out. Have you nothing to say about home? Are your memories of home stings in your heart? Or had you not a sweet home, though a humble one? Was not the fire that warmed that home in itself a poem? Were there not at least some fire-wrought shadows on the grate that were better than many pictures if you had had eyes to see them? Remember how well you have slept; remember how much recuperative force you have had; remember what a steward God made you of the great treasure of vitality. You have not had much money, but look at your spirits, remember your cheerfulness. Many a millionaire would have given half his income if he could have had half your jocundness, but the poor creature was bent down and overborne and driven away into despondency, and he thought all his treasure was but a

row of cyphers ; and here you have been all this time enjoying every little daisy you could get hold of, and hearing every little bird and being blessed by its song. You should put that down on the other side. You had a poor financial income, but what a wonderful well of water within you springing up into continual hopefulness and mirthfulness ; and when people heard your laugh they wondered at it ; still, that laugh was part of your treasure. You have not had a very festive life so far as social circumstances are concerned ; you are nobody in society, nobody waits for you, nobody knows you, you are left a great deal to yourself ; but "Son, remember." What a wonderful power of thinking you have ! You can people the house with ghosts from all centuries, you can have your little table surrounded by the Popes of Rome, by the Archbishops of Canterbury, by the warriors of the world, by the thinkers and poets and dreamers and explorers ; you can turn all your history into a great companionship. Then how inventive you are ! You have that wonderful faculty that can turn stones into children unto Abraham ; you are wonderfully idealistic, imaginative, and penetrating, so as to see second meanings and third meanings and upper meanings even in timber itself. "Son, remember." Many a man has had his personalty sworn at a million who was not worth one ten-thousandth part of what you are worth : where he had an estate you had a thought. "Son, remember."

It is almost with a sore heart that one turns to the other aspect of the case and looks with some measure of sympathy upon those whose lot in life is hard. What have they got to remember in addition to what has been already suggested ? How can we administer the kind of sympathy that is now present in my mind ? Yet that

it is true sympathy I know by experience as well as by observation. Do you know that sometimes by your very suffering, and suffering well, you are doing good to others? You would be surprised if you could hear what people say about you, and you would be amazed if you knew what silent rebukes you are to persons who are always impatient and discontented with their own circumstances. They go away from you and say, "If that can be borne so patiently, with what fortitude should I meet my little penalties and sufferings! Not a word of complaint, a cheerful countenance, a voice out of which every exasperating tone has been taken; yet here am I grating, complaining, whining: God help me, I will do so no more!" That was your ministry, yet you thought yourself no servant of God. Suffering heroically borne is eloquence. Paul and Silas were in the prison singing; the Authorised Version says, "And the prisoners heard," but the Revised Version says, "The prisoners were listening." We do not know how large our congregation is. There is a man always in the vestibule who is hearing, and it may be to his soul's salvation. We cannot tell within what a large circle of criticism we live. Even little children have their opinions about us. They look without apparently seeing, and they go away and pronounce judgment upon us. What manner of persons ought we to be? One might so live as to serve God without ever opening one's lips in public testimony or exposition. We teach by example. I have been rebuked many a time by seeing how sufferings greater than mine can be borne. There never was a case of suffering but there was another case that overlapped it in the extent of its sorrow and pain and misery; and when you have come to what you think the last great sorrow, and say, "Beyond this there can be nothing," behold there rises a cross, the middle one

on Calvary ; and beside that anguish all other sufferings dry their tears and call themselves but beginnings of joy.

Then have we ever reflected—for here I would rather speak to myself than to others—that every tinge of pain we have felt has been needed by us to refine our character to its best quality? We have seen this in others, but have we seen it in ourselves? Some men need seven days in the week to be under the wheel. "My God, is this not cruel? Might they not have one half-day's release?" And he says, "No: every revolution of this wheel takes away something of baseness and meanness and unworthiness from this character. I am God ; I will not smite above that they are able to bear it ; my purpose is to chasten and refine and perfect human character." As the Captain of our salvation was made perfect through suffering, so we have to be perfected through loss and pain and sorrow. Our tears are God's ministers.

I am glad to escape from that line of remark, for it appears to be ruthless. Yet it is true, it is supported and justified by facts ; but I will turn and in one sentence deliver judgment upon another class—namely, upon those who have every kind of prosperity here and now. Let me suppose a man who has only to put out his finger and transmute everything into gold. See how fat he is, how prosperous ! He rides in chariots, he commands servants, he builds himself palaces ; whatsoever his eyes desire he draws to himself for selfish purposes. If that man should lift up his eyes in hell he has no business to appeal to anybody else for help. "Son, remember": you had your heaven, and devoured it. You said you would have it yonder ; you got it. You obeyed the laws of nature, you thought, and nature is about the sternest judge next to God. Nature is God's minister. You cannot have two

heavens ; that is to say, if you have deliberately chosen secularism you have no right to think anything about spirituality ; and if it should turn out that there is a hell—and we know there is a hell on earth, whatever there is beyond death—you have no right to complain. You said you would eat up your loaf now ; you had it : “ Son, remember.” Blessed are they who have laid up treasure in heaven ; blessed are they who declare plainly that they seek a country, a country out of sight ; and if at last there should be nothing up yonder but cloud, great blue infinity, decorated with sparks that we thought were worlds and that we called planets and stars, yet all the while in travelling so they have been travelling highly, they have been living grandly, they have been enjoying a multitude of thoughts such as gave the soul great liberties even in the educational process. The Christian has his heaven on the road as well as yonder ; and that is the peculiarity of truth, that it begins to pay wages at once. It does not leave you in any mystery as to what shall be. Nor does iniquity. Iniquity holds judgment every night ; iniquity will not let the debauchee sleep as the child sleeps, though he may sleep in the same bed,—cursed be the possibility ! We live in a wondrous universe. The Christian has in every aspect what may be termed, for want of a better expression, the best of it. If there should be nothing up yonder but blue cloud, the dear soul that loved us and prayed for us and sweetened our lot for us by many a kindly lesson and much friendly example will never know it. But if there should be a future, if all these Biblical testimonies are fraught with a meaning that is literal and historical, what then shall the end be ? I do not want to be told after death that I have already had my heaven. Saviour, teach me so to live that all heaven will always be to come ; yea, so to live and trust in thee and love thee

that even my first sight of heaven itself shall be nothing to my second sight of it, and my second shall be but a dawn compared to a noontide ; and so may there always be some new heaven,—there will be for the souls that love the Christ of God. Oh, it is the sound of a mocking wind which comes down upon a bad man's life, which says to him, “Son, remember!” Some of us would be almost in heaven if we had no memory. Our memory is our hell!

PHASES OF TEXTS.

“. . or rather.”—GAL. iv. 9.

THE whole verse reads, “But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God” The same idea is utilised in Rom. viii. 34: “It is Christ that died, yea rather” It would seem as if the Apostle amended his own expression by enlarging it, which is a process of amendment well known in nature and in providence. The first reading of the text is, that the Galatians themselves had discovered God. The Apostle had no sooner said this than he corrected himself by adding that God had discovered them. Notice the difference. It is one thing to discover God, and another thing for God to discover man. A discovered God is an idol. The man who discovers God boasts of his own cleverness in making such a valuable discovery. The fact is that we are indebted to revelation for God. God is not a discovery, he is a revelation. “The world by wisdom knew

not God.” In the second case (Rom. viii. 34), the Apostle simply enlarges his statement: “It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again.” The resurrection is a larger fact than the death. These instances show (1) what is meant by substantial inspiration. The Apostle corrects his own words in the first instance, and he enlarges them in the second, yet this is no discredit to his inspiration. In fluent writing or speech we may in the first instance give too much credit to the penetration of our readers or hearers, and we may suddenly remember that many persons require to have things made exceedingly plain before they can comprehend the meaning. Paul was inspired in both cases, yet in both cases he amended his own expression. (2) The distinction between Christianity and every other religion is broadly marked. In other religions we have man seeking God; in the Christian religion we have God seeking man. In the one case

philosophy is straining itself after discovery, and in the other Eternal Love is bringing itself in gracious condescension before the vision of the heart. "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." (3) It is the duty of the Church to seek out and represent the largest meanings. There is an oak in an acorn, and we should find it. There is a great tree in a small mustard seed, and by that tree the mustard seed itself should be interpreted. There is always more in a text than any preacher has discovered. Wise readers do not read meanings into texts, but read texts into larger meanings.

In Rom. vi. 17 the Apostle says, "God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you." We advance from life to life with the growing day. The more nearly we live to God the keener will be our penetration into all the mysteries of his kingdom. The more closely we study the Bible the more shall we see how even its simplest expressions spread themselves over the whole area of life.

"The Lord God . . . abundant in goodness and truth."—Ex. xxxiv. 6.

It is most notable that some form of the word "abundance"

is constantly used in relation to the bestowal of divine gifts. They come in wave upon wave, or billow upon billow, bringing with them the idea that they come from an infinite supply. Take a few instances: "He will abundantly pardon" (Isa. lv. 7); "They shall be abundantly satisfied with fatness" (Ps. xxxvi. 8); "It shall blossom abundantly" (Isa. xxxv. 2); "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John x. 10); "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. iii. 20); "His abundant mercy" (1 Peter i. 3); "An entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly" (2 Peter i. 11); These passages make it evident that divine gifts are not instances of economy, but examples of infinite willingness to bestow the gifts of heaven upon the sons of men.

Three thoughts are suggested by such passages: (1) We are not straitened in God. We are encouraged to bring with us great prayers—vast petitions—to the throne of the heavenly grace. Expect great things of God. Such expectation is founded upon his own promises. "Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it"

(Mal. iii. 10). We are worse than atheists if we complain that we have not sufficient divine grace. "Ye have not because ye ask not, or because ye ask amiss." "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally." Liberally is equivalent to abundantly. God's gifts are distinguished by over-plus. (2) Our love is to be after the measure of God's: "Be ye holy as your Father in heaven is holy." We are to operate upon the divine scale according to our ability and opportunity. "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly." "Freely ye have received, freely give." To receive abundantly, and to give sparingly, is to grieve the spirit of God. (3) Our confidence in the ultimate crowning of the Cross is to be abundant. The fulness of the Gentiles is to come to Calvary. All nations are to bow down before Jesus, bringing to him their gold and incense. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied. The whole wilderness is to be as one fragrant rose. We have seen nothing yet, we have had but drops of prophesied blessings; the fulness of the heavenly rain is yet to fertilise the waiting earth. My soul, hope thou in God.

"Tell no man that thing."—
LUKE ix. 21.

Don't babble out all you know. Have a city of the mind. There is a time to speak and there is a time to be silent. Don't turn great mercies into topics of gossip. Have bread to eat that the world knows not of. Why not choose a special promise and make it a peculiar treasure? There is a strength in reserve as well as in declaration. Always know more than you tell. But what good will it do if we do not tell it? (1) We may accept silence as a discipline. (2) We may work in the spirit of our secret knowledge. We know what this is in practical life. Though we know that our loved one will die, yet we speak the cheerful word of hope, or work with a new energy, or infuse a new tone into our conversation. Or we may know that we have secretly sinned, and that secrecy may chasten us into a more delicate modesty. These are things that we do not tell, yet how strongly and happily they may affect the expression of our whole life! Or the meaning may be, tell this thing to no unsympathetic hearer. There are men who have no ear for music; do not waste the divine melody upon their deafness. We shall know the true hearer when we meet him. If we ourselves would have larger communications from God, we

must live in the spirit which is prepared to receive them. God has no messages for the frivolous, the selfish, the sordid. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." The Queen of Sheba said concerning the splendours of Solomon, "The half has not been told me." Some things we can never wholly tell. The story of love is endless. If any man ask us the way to Jesus we can point it out; but if any man ask us how much we have received of Jesus, we are utterly unable to exhaust the bounty of his Cross.

"Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place."—2 COR. ii. 14.

From this reading it might be supposed that the apostles had only to go into a city in order to capture it for Christ. Apparently Paul represents the apostles as victors in all places, as if Satan and all his allies went down before them as stubble before fire. In this view of the text there is no doubt that the apostles adopted a tone of boasting in regard to their missionary labours: "always causeth us to triumph";

as if the triumph were due to personal eloquence or intellectual force on the part of the preachers.

The correct reading of the text is the exact opposite of this view, and might be put thus: "But thanks be unto God, which always leadeth us in triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest through us the savour of his knowledge in every place." What a different representation! What a vivid picture! The idea is that Jesus Christ is driving in a triumphal car, and that he takes with him the souls he has saved and points them out as the victories he has won. (1) This puts Christ in his right position. He takes his trophies with him. In his hand is the victorious spear of his grace. (2) This puts Christians in their right place,—they have been taken at the spear point; they are the victories of the Cross; through them Christ reveals the universality and omnipotence of his grace.

The case may be illustrated by examples. Let us hear Christ speaking upon the fruits of his holy war: (1) "I converted Saul of Tarsus, so *self-righteousness* is conquerable." (2) "I converted the dying thief, so *despair* is conquerable." (3) "I converted the publican, so *self-contempt* is conquerable." (4) "I converted the prodigal son, so *hard-heartedness* is conquerable." Christians are

to be specimens of Christ's victorious grace. The doctrine comes to us in personal instances, in actual character, in living evidence. "Beholding the man, they could say nothing against it." "Once I was blind, now I see." "If any man be in Christ Jesus he is a new creature." Such are the triumphs by which Jesus Christ illustrates the power of his grace. What an honour for the Christian! Hear him as he meekly says: "Jesus is pointing me out as a proof of what he can do for sinful man. And if so great an honour, a corresponding responsibility! What if I be the occasion of unbelief? What if men stumble over me into ruin?" Christians should remember this view of their conversion. They preach by their very silence. Men say, "Let us look at those Christians and see wherein they differ from ourselves." It is not enough that Christians are as decent, respectable, and praiseworthy as their neighbours who make no profession of religion; they should hear in their hearts the searching inquiry, "What do ye more than others?"

"I have given mount Seir unto Esau."—DEUT. ii. 5.

"I have given Ar unto the children of Lot."—DEUT. ii. 9.

Here we are face to face with the divine Giver. The world is

not ruled by speculation or by chance, but by Sovereign Providence. Note the majestic tone of the distribution. There is no hint of consultation with others. The voice is supreme, imperative, final.

The one thing to be noticed is that the same Providence not only rules to-day in the history which is occurring round about us, but is so patent as to be almost visible to the naked eye. God is the Distributer of gifts. (1) To one man he gives the harp of poetry. The man is a poet from his birth. No credit is due to him for the original genius. (2) To another man is given the plough of agriculture. He will accept his plough in the right spirit if he has sufficient spiritual insight to see that the plough itself is but another form of the harp. The ploughman has poetry of his own. He must not think that the harp of the poet is superior to the plough of the agriculturist. Harp and plough are alike the gift of God. (3) To another man is given the genius of statesmanship. He can take large views of things. He can see how an average line runs through great masses of relationships and counterparts and conflicting interests. (4) To another man is given the ability to develop home-life into an instrument at once beautiful and beneficent. The home-maker is a statesman on a

small scale. He takes account of his house; he is thrifty, industrious, and unostentatiously self-sacrificing. In this way we may go through the whole area of human differences and note how true it is that as certainly as God gave mount Seir unto Esau, and Ar unto the children of Lot, he is now giving gifts, opportunities, and blessings to those who put their trust in him. Jesus Christ recognised this principle in his teaching. He came to reveal the kingdom of God—not the possibility of God, but the personal sovereignty and majesty of God.

Suppose we thoroughly believed this doctrine, what results would follow? (1) *Contentment* with gifts. We should see that each man has some peculiar trust from God. Each man would say, in effect: "I did not make myself. I have one talent, my neighbour has two, and his neighbour has five: so be it; it is the Lord's will. He who gave mount Seir unto Esau has given me my talent, to do with it what I can." (2) We should adopt a sure and just basis of judgment. Instead of censuring each other for want of ability, or envying each other because of mental superiority or social advantage, we should recognise the hand of God in all our life, and say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth good in his sight." (3) We should thus re-

cognise God as the constructor of society. When we see things aright we shall know that society, as well as a star, is the direct creation of God. Society means unity, brotherhood, co-operation; society holds great trusts from heaven; society should be a sanctuary in which the Almighty dwells and reigns. Do not let us be theologians in regard to doctrine, and atheists in regard to society. We speak of tumults, revolutions, wars, and upheavals of every kind, as if society were the sport of chance. It is not so. All these powers and all these expressions of energy are under the control of God. A great poem is being written by the divine hand, and will be set to music by a contented universe.

"The Prince of Peace."—
ISA. ix. 6.

There can be no doubt, on the part of Bible readers, as to the kingship of Jesus. We are accustomed to think of him as Saviour and Healer and Teacher; we should also think of him in his kingly capacity. He always associated himself with the kingdom of God.

In the text he is spoken of as "The Prince of Peace." The conjunction of titles is significant. There is an element of Godhead

even in such relationship of terms. The word "prince" is generally thought of in connexion with state and glory and war and conquest; it required the Son of God to refine such a term and make it worthy of conjunction with the word "peace." In Isa. xxxii. 1 we read that "A king shall reign in righteousness." Righteousness is but another form of the term peace. The kingdom of heaven is first pure, then peaceable. The peace which Jesus contemplates, either as Prince or King, is a peace that is founded upon right and truth and law. In Jer. xxiii. 5 we have the same thought: "A King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth." These are Messianic prophecies; whatever may have been their primary reference, Jesus Christ alone can cover their entire significance.

Look at Jesus Christ's estimate of himself as to kingliness and majesty. He said, "In this place is one greater than the temple." Only a Jew could understand, even approximately, the grandeur of this claim, for out of heaven what could there be so glorious as the great temple? On another occasion Jesus said, "A greater than Solomon is here," yet the name Solomon stood for wisdom, riches, splendour, and all that was dazzling in pomp and sovereignty. In Matthew xxviii. 18 Jesus says, "All

power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." In Luke xxii. 30 he says, "That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom." Yet he was meek and lowly in heart! Yet he was "The Prince of Peace"! Yet he humbled himself and listened unto death! The revelation of the Christ is not an affair of some peasant child startling his age by precocity, either by intellect or goodness. The matter is infinitely higher and vaster in every aspect. This is an occasion of ascension from a lower condition to a higher one; it is the sublimest instance in history, or in imagination, of condescension, humiliation, impoverishment.

The apostles regarded Christ in the same regal manner. In Acts iii. 15 he is spoken of as "the Prince of life"; and in Acts x. 36 we read, "Jesus Christ, he is Lord of all." The Apostle Paul in Rom. xiv. 9 described Jesus Christ as "Lord both of the dead and living." In 1 Cor. xv. 25 the Apostle says of Jesus, "He must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet." In Eph. i. 20, 21 we read, "Set him at his own right hand, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named." The Apostle does not hesitate to speak of Jesus Christ of Nazareth as "The blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord

of lords." In Rev. i. 5 our Lord is described as "the prince of the kings of the earth"; and in the same book (iii. 21) we read, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne."

This, then, is our Lord! We are not worshipping an evolution. In the case of Christ the evolution is reversed; man does not rise to God, but God divests himself, empties himself, and becomes a man. Do we sufficiently remember that our Lord is King? Has he not made us a kingdom of priests? Ought we to consider meekness as implying obliteration? Ought not the Church, the whole Church of the redeemed, to lift up its head and seek to reflect the splendour of the infinite majesty? Let us enter into our holy inheritance in Christ, and rouse ourselves to an appreciation of our true dignity in him. "We can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us." In ourselves we are less than nothing; in Christ we have the riches of the universe as our protection against poverty and weakness.

"As though he needed any thing."—ACTS xvii. 25.

The Apostle is speaking about God, the true God, the God of creation and providence. Paul contends that this God did not

require to be worshipped by men's hands as though he needed anything. Yet this same God accepts the worship of men's hands! What is the explanation of this apparent contradiction? We shall find that explanation in our own daily experience. There are two sorts of giving: (a) Alms, (b) Tokens. Sometimes we give out of benevolence; at other times we give out of friendship, and all the impulses which make it almost a sacrament. We give *alms* to a beggar; we give tokens to a friend. Take three illustrations: (1) A *testimonial* is not alms. It is a recognition of merit. It is an expression of love. It is the embodiment of thankfulness. The receiver of the testimonial may be a richer man than any one of the subscribers to the testimonial fund. The gift is therefore not made on the ground of necessity, but on the ground of appreciation. (2) A legacy is not alms. There also may be an expression of esteem, given to a person who has not the slightest need for it as mere money. The receiver of the legacy may have money enough, yet the gift may be most acceptable to him as an expression of confidence and affection. (3) Hospitality is not alms. You do not invite your friends to dinner on the ground that they cannot buy a dinner for themselves. The dinner is not a charity, it is an act of fellow-

ship ; it may be a very sacrament of love. Hospitality may delight in things seasonable, even in luxuries, probably in music and in flowers. We must look for the spiritual meaning of hospitality. It is evident that we do not give good things to our friends as though they needed anything. The very charm of life consists in hospitality, in flowers, in legacies, in testimonial offerings, in seasonable gifts, and the like. You could do without the outward and visible signs, but life would be poor without the love which they express. Behind the gift look for the explaining love, and let the degree of that love be your appreciation of the gift.

These illustrations help us to understand the meaning of the true worship of the true God. (1) God does not need our money as a beggar by the wayside may need it ; yet he receives it, and pours out a blessing in return for it. God does not need our help, for he wields all power ; yet men have been "cursed" for not going up to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty. The little child cannot help you to carry your burden, yet when it puts out its tiny hand in your assistance, your heart is filled with a more confident courage. God does not need our patronage. What candle can patronise the sun ? What little

ceiling of man's making can offer patronage to the firmament which holds all the stars ? But God receives our love, our prayers, our gifts, our acknowledgments of his sovereignty, and in return he pours upon us a plentiful rain of grace and joy. (2) Though God does not need us, yet we cannot help giving to God as if he besought our love. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me ?" That is a question which rises spontaneously from the heart. It is a question based upon reason and upon fact. Every gift should be an occasion for a new song. "Of Thine own have we given thee." The earth returns flowers for the rain and the sunshine. The birds praise God for the morning light ; we, who receive still greater blessings, should sing still greater songs. (3) God does not ask for our benevolence, but for our gratitude. We exchange benevolences as equals and inferiors, but when we come before God it is not to perform a charity ; but to express an obligation, and to develop the spirit of true worship.

"He was a great man . . . because . . ."—2 KINGS v. 1.

Greatness must be accounted for. All true greatness has a history behind it. There may be

very sudden popularities, but speaking broadly greatness is the last point in a long series of action and merit. There should be some reason for greatness or the world would be overspread with illegitimate reputations. Notoriety that is not founded upon merit will soon become punishment to the man upon whom it has been inflicted. Never try to steal a reputation. Fame must be paid for with an honourable price,—faithfulness, courage, competency, beneficence, brilliance; in some such way must fame be secured if it is to be healthy and lasting.

The text may be used as an accommodation for showing that Christianity itself is willing to be judged by its historical facts and the personal experiences which it has created. Of man after man we are able to say he was great, (1) because the Gospel was made known through his influence far and wide; (2) because the poor have been blessed by his continual attention and good doing; (3) because he rendered some great service to society. "He sang the song of the shirt." A man who enjoys fame without some such reason cannot have that element which is the true value of all repute—namely, the commendation of his own conscience.

The Godhead itself is willing to be judged by the verdict of

reason. God challenges comparison with all the gods of the earth. Behind the majesty there is a "*because*." "Sing unto the Lord." Why? "For he hath triumphed gloriously." We sing unto the Lord because of the deeds he has wrought on our behalf. We have so seen Providence that we must celebrate its blessing in public song. "Praise ye the Lord." Why? "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust." Can men be so raised and yet be religiously dumb? "I love the Lord." Why? "Because he hath heard my voice." Love is founded upon reason. Emotion rests upon fact. There is nothing merely sentimental about Christian experience and sacrifice. "O praise the Lord all ye nations!" Why? "For his merciful kindness is great towards us." The reason is never suppressed. We can account for our Christian songs; they are not mere ebullitions of feeling; they are spiritual necessities. The bird sings to the sunshine, the soul hails the new mercy with a new song.

So we praise Christ for redemption. He has washed us in his own blood and made us kings and priests unto God and the Father. When there was no eye to pity us, his own eye beamed with compassion and tenderness. How can we refuse to sing when we think of Gethsemane, and

Calvary, and all the offers of pardon, based upon the great transaction which they represent? So also we praise the Spirit for sanctification.

What have we done to deserve our position of comfort, or influence, or honour? Are we only nominally great, or are we really great? If we have not entitled ourselves to our honours let us go forth and do so now.

"Bury me with my fathers. . . . There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah."—GEN. xlix. 29, 31.

What can it matter where a man is buried? Is not the whole earth consecrated ground? (1) There is a natural sentiment for which Jacob gave reasons. They were tender reasons. They were the very reasons which give continuity and security to society. Men often say more than they intended to say. The spirit of prophecy speaks through the common observations of life. Jacob was pointing to a larger fellowship and a completer gathering when he dwelt upon this reunion of families. (2) There is an elementary sentiment: "my fathers." This is a very infantile notion of

things—perfectly proper so far as it goes; it is, indeed, a root out of which a great tree may grow. These initial and premonitory instincts and sentiments are never to be discouraged; they are the protoplasm of the larger brotherhood—the ultimate family idea. (3) There is an historical sentiment: "There they buried"; "And there I buried." We should be rich in reminiscence. Deeds we have already done should be regarded as examples or as warnings.

In a sense, all this sentiment is changed by Christianity, not in the sense of destruction, but in the sense of expansion. There are indestructible sentiments. These sentiments are the very security of human unity and progress. We may call them instincts, or inspirations, or sentiments, but there they are, and they must be dealt with as facts. It will for ever remain true that "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin." Her own baby's grave can never be regarded by any mother as only a part of a public cemetery. Nor can she regard it as only of the same value as the adjoining tomb. That one little grave will always be to her the most precious treasure. This is, of course, narrow-minded on her part, and yet it is an emotion behind which there is a sacred and inspiring history.

Does Jesus Christ treat all

personal and elementary sentiment as of small account? Does he rebuke or despise it? On the contrary, Jesus Christ enlarges everything in our nature that is in itself true. (1) Take the matter of worship. Does he abolish worship when he speaks, as it were, disparagingly of "this mountain" and "Jerusalem"? Certainly not. In speaking to the woman of Samaria he did not limit the area of worship, but infinitely extended it. What she regarded as local and material, he regarded as universal and spiritual. (2) Take the matter of beneficence. Are we to do good only to those from whom we receive good? Are we to salute those only who have saluted us? Jesus Christ does not discourage natural civility or the exchange of kindly feeling and interest. Nothing of the kind; he infinitely enlarges all that is beautiful in natural courtesy, saying: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." "If thine enemy smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Thus Jesus Christ does not crush natural sentiment, but elevates, sanctifies, and expands its application. (3) Take the matter of righteousness. Are we to be content with ordinary behaviour, ordinary decency? Jesus Christ says in

answer to such questions, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." (4) Take the matter of the Gospel itself. Is it a gospel for one nation? Is it a little luxury of specialised patriotism? Is it for the Jew, but not for the Gentile? Hear the great answer of the Saviour of the world: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature."

Beautiful it is to watch how gradually, but surely, the spirit of expansiveness follows the advancement of Christianity. The doctrine of Christ never contracts, it constantly and of necessity expands and glorifies. "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring." "I perceive that in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him." "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

Thus Jacob begins the expression of natural and most tender sentiments; he does not see that in Jesus Christ all the world will be consecrated, and that wherever we are as to mere distance in miles, we are close together in spirit, in sympathy, in hope, and in love. Let us regard our natural sentiments as but the beginning,

or dawn, of sublime revelations. Time and space will flee away before the holy influence of conscious unity in the divine nature.

"So Saul died, and his three sons, and all his house died together."—I CHRON. x. 6.

"And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation."—EXOD. i. 6.

First the individual; second the family; third the generation. In the long-run death becomes a commonplace! If only one man had died, and only one grave had been dug, the world would have journeyed from afar to look upon the marvel. Death has made such great havoc that all the earth seems to be but one huge grave. The world is a cemetery. Observe how the unit is changed: it begins with man, it proceeds to family, it advances to generation.

The incident may be applied in many directions. "All that generation" of Givers, Workers, Examples. They have taken with them the old vogue of things, which was often the best vogue. There is a sense in which the former times were in many respects better than these. Never forget that the men who made England lived under laws which we should now consider to be invidious and oppressive. Never

forget that the men who bore the most emphatic testimony on behalf of Christianity believed in doctrines which are now considered old-fashioned or even obsolete. The new laws and the new fashions have yet to be tested. We should believe in progress; but there is no progress of any real value in the direction of self-indulgence, indolence, disregard of tried standards, and contempt of historical names. In the old time men were inspired by the spirit of reverence,—they respected old age; they were faithful to intellectual discipline; they believed that individuality is the true basis of all that is best in socialism.

Joseph and his brethren have gone. Saul and his house have fallen. Our fathers and leaders are dead. Our great examples have passed away. It is not enough for us to contemplate them, or to fall into reveries about their excellence. The questions which we have to ask are: "Who will take their places? Who will be baptised for the dead? Who will make up the deficiency in funds created by their removal? Who will take the vacant chair at the Sunday school?" There never were such great opportunities for young men to come forward in the Christian cause as there are to-day.

"The princes of the children of Ammon said to Hanun, Thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? are not his servants come unto thee for to search, and to overthrow, and to spy out the land?"—I CHRON. xix. 3.

Read the whole context, and having made the historical case clear, proceed with the reflections proper to the present generation.

(1) There are persons who cannot give credit for a really good motive. They can always see how good actions can be traced to bad influences. They poison all the springs of life. Instead of reading events up into excellence they read them down into degradation. Beware of such people, for they drag down all that is best in human aspiration and service. (2) There are persons who are always making enemies instead of making friends. They suspect others. They are quite sure that there is no real good in the world. They think sympathy itself is a species of investment. David meant to show kindness unto Hanun, and they turned the wine of his love to acidity and to poison. Some men have an unfortunate genius for making enemies. When we go forth to business morning by morning it should be to multiply friends, and to make life more

genial and beautiful. Avoid people who endeavour to set you against your fellow citizens or against those who would show you favour and give you help.

(3) All such action is really a *self-revelation*: there are persons who judge others by what they themselves would have done. They would have deceived David themselves, therefore they think that David is attempting to deceive Hanun. As water cannot rise above its own level, so there are men who feel intensely the limitations of their quality. Always remember that when you suspect you are giving occasion to other people to suspect you. Great natures give others credit for being simple-minded and sincere.

(4) Beware of the misjudgments of life: there are people so clever that they think they can "read between the lines"; their cleverness is too clever. Always endeavour to read things into bigger meanings. This is the spirit of Christianity. (5) We cannot limit such misjudgments to ourselves,—such suspicion eventually suspects even God himself. There is a remarkable passage bearing upon this in Psalm l. 21: "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself." Self-projection is a marvellous faculty. When we think of God we think of an infinite man. When we think of heaven we think of some present pleasure increased by

infinity. The worst of self-projection is, that when we begin to suspect good men we can hardly fall short of suspecting God himself. We thus misjudge Providence. We thus think that all things are working against us, when at the very time they are working out the issues of our salvation. (6) All such suspicion and jealousy bring their own torment. Suspicious natures are never happy. The jealous man is his own murderer. Jealousy never sees with a clear eye. It first creates some vicious medium, and through that it looks upon the very light of the morning and upon the very flowers of summer.

What is the only remedy for such mischief? The love of Christ. The power of the Holy Spirit. These are the sources of regeneration. Other sources are impossible. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." There are minds to which evil thoughts would never occur. These minds are under the dominion of the Spirit. They live in God. They would rather be deceived than yield themselves to the malign influence of jealousy and suspicion. "Evil be to him that evil thinks." Never imagine that you can cure yourselves of suspicion, jealousy, meanness,

selfishness. The one remedy is in the Holy Spirit. "Marvel not that I say unto thee, Ye must be born again."

People who thought well of themselves.

Make a collection of such instances from the Bible, and show how such men constitute a sort of church of self-satisfaction. One man says, "I thank thee that I am not as other men are." This was the Pharisee, and this was part of his prayer. He knew exactly how much good he did. He lived, as it were, by written rule, and he was anxious that everybody should know the rule, and admire him for his obedience. The next man said: "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment." Here is another instance of self-consciousness. This man lived upon his respectability. This man made an example of himself, and said, in effect, "Behold me, and see what it is to be not only upright, but perfect." This man was thus setting himself up in the place of God without knowing it, and perhaps without intending it. We do not always see the proper issue or the right reading of self-exaltation. It may not end in respectability, it may displace the adoration due to God. This kind of self-appraisement does not say,

"See what God has done for me"; it says rather, "See what I have done for myself." A fourth man said, "All these have I kept from my youth up." He knew himself to be an excellent young man. He had turned the commandments into commonplaces. True morality or moral excellence does not come by any easy process. It comes by self-crucifixion, by discipline, by incessant watchfulness. The fifth man said, "I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." He was a ceremonialist, he was a slave of the letter. He lived in his hands rather than in his heart. We may obey the letter, and yet disobey the spirit. What an awful possibility is this! We may not steal with our hands, but we may be thieves in our heart.

What is true of the individual may also be true of the community, even though that community be a Christian Church,—Christian, at least, in name. Here is an instance: "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." What self-deception! How reluctant people should be to judge themselves because of the temptation to magnify personal excellence! Self-satisfaction is a sure sign of self-deception. The Apostle Paul counted not himself to have attained. We are to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord

and Saviour Jesus Christ." The only perfection possible to man, here and now, is the perfection of desire; that is to say, that the soul shall be ruled by a supreme desire to be holy and perfect according to the purpose of God in Christ Jesus.

All self-adoration implies four things: (1) A mistaken conception of character; (2) a hopeless condition of heart; (3) a hostile relation to the Gospel; (4) the most blasphemous impeachment of the character of Christ. He claims to be the only Saviour of the world, but the self-idolater misplaces Christ and takes the glory to himself.

"And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come." MARK iv. 26-29.

The kingdom of God always reveals itself through some human suggestion or some social parallel. In this beautiful parable

the "man" works up to the limit of his ability, and then leaves God to carry out the work which no human hands can do. What is true of the kingdom of God in this respect is true also of the culture of human life. At a given point human energy can do no more; at that critical point the Holy Spirit takes up the living parable.

God does not undertake to sow our harvests or to reap them; he calls upon us to sow the seed, and when we have done so to retire from the field. Anxiety about the sown seed can do no good. What if a farmer should after sowing his seed sit down upon the ground and vex his soul as to the result? What good would he do? Can anxiety help the growth of the seed? Man is simply to do whatever lies within his own power and then to leave all issues to the Father of mercies.

Men agitate themselves infinitely too much about the progress of the kingdom of God. Anxiety in this matter is only a special form of atheism. God takes care of all his own kingdoms. There is an enthusiasm that is at once natural, holy, and sublime. There is unhappily an enthusiasm which is nothing more than godless panic. We have to preach the Gospel, to expound the Gospel, and to live the Gospel, and lovingly and loyally trust the Lord to bring

his own gracious purposes to consummation.

In this parable Jesus Christ would distinctly teach us the difference between cultivation and germination. In effect he says, "Plough your ground, rid it of all stones and weeds, cast in the grain, and then quietly leave the case, knowing that germination is a process you can neither understand nor control." Having sown the seed, fall asleep. God will then take care of his own purposes.

Do you want something to do? Cast in the seed. Do you wish to show your faith in God? Then fall asleep on the pillow of his promises. Do you wish to know the very spirit of true knowledge? Then know that there are some things which you do not know. There is a criminal ignorance, and there is a godly ignorance. You can sow seed, you cannot understand germination. Suppose a man should say that he will not sow seed until he can fully comprehend the whole process of germination? Instantly the folly of such a man would bring upon itself the derision of society. Yet this is exactly what some people do with regard to the kingdom of God! Until they can understand the whole mystery of the divine purpose they will not put forth any effort to save the world.

Jesus Christ would in this parable make us co-workers with God. "The earth bringeth forth fruit of herself." We are to associate ourselves with the natural and providential mysteries that spread themselves through the whole economy of life and nature.

**"The Lord is my shepherd ;
I shall not want."**—Ps. xxiii. 1.

"The Lord is my shepherd." How to draw the infinite upon a small scale! How to bring God out of astral sovereignties, and place him, as it were, within measurable and accessible relations! This is what God himself graciously does in the whole process of revelation and spiritual communion. He wants to come nearer and nearer to us. Once he came so near that men said, "He dwelt among us." In the Old Testament God reduces himself so that he can be recognised as a "dwelling-place" and "refuge." In the text he comes before us in the humble but pathetic guise of a "shepherd." All the metaphors by which the divine condescension is made plain are so many attempts to draw God on what is termed a limited scale. We look at a map and find in the corner some such expression as "a mile to an inch,"—the meaning being, that the

inch is to be regarded as a mile. Lay the rule upon the map and say that from one point to another there are ten inches; imagination instantly sets to work and multiplies the ten inches into ten miles. In its own degree and way the same thing applies to the revelation of God. "Like as a father,"—then we have to multiply what we know of the best and sweetest fatherhood by infinity, and say when we reach our furthest limit, "That is but the beginning of God."

Jesus Christ often set himself forth in images. He was the "door," the "vine," the "bread," the "water," the "way." Wherever we see beauty we should see Christ. Whenever we hear music we should hear the lower tones of his voice. Wherever we see love we should see an outline of God, for "God is love."

Every soul is at liberty to construct its own metaphors and emblems, by which it can most clearly realise the divine nature, presence, and action. Beware never to limit the divine Personality by the human emblem. Every soul may enjoy God in some almost personal and exclusive sense. "The Lord is my shepherd." Here is a personal appropriation, as if the whole deity belonged to one adoring heart. And this is verily so in a sense that can be well under-

stood, for may not every man have all the sunshine he can enjoy without encroaching upon any man's enjoyment of the same light. The sunshine fills the whole space, yet takes up no man's room. Every man may breathe all the air he needs; yet such is the chymic economy of nature that every other man may refresh himself at the same source of health. We do not all eat in the same way, nor at the same time, nor in the same order; yet eating is essential to the sustenance of all life.

How to interpret the divine through the human is one of the sublimest processes of spiritual culture. God himself permits this method of interpretation. "Like as a father." "If ye then being evil." This is the profoundest application of the great original explanation of man: "God created man in his own image." Know yourself if you would know God. Carry up all your best intuitions, instincts, and impulses to their finest points, and constitute them, so to say, into an instrument through which you can see the invisible God.

"And wished for the day."—
ACTS xxvii. 29.

All we can do has been done. We have endured the affliction, we have carried forward the

strenuous contention, we have made the last sacrifice. Now all we can do is to wish for the day.

This is so in education. There is a time in the child's education when the most loving parent must stop and wish for the day. It is the same with all industry; there is a stopping-place in all processes. The agriculturist can only sow his grain, he cannot make it grow; he can only wish for the day. Some things cannot be hastened by man. Who can hasten the rising of the sun? What can anxiety do but wish for the day? Who can accelerate the rotation of the earth? In this matter we can do nothing. We long for the light, but cannot hasten its movements. Trusting in the loving God, we can but wish for the day. Who can hasten the seasons? We are longing for the spring, but we cannot quicken her steps. We sigh for the summer that we may revel in her infinite beauty, but she comes by processes which we cannot control. "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" Which of you can make one hair white or black? Thus we come to stopping-points. Ours is a very short line, yet if we make the most of its points we shall find God's welcome when we close our endeavours.

In the thirty-third verse there is a beautiful word of hope: "While

the day was coming on." A poem in a sentence! To the trustful and loving soul the day is always coming on. The day of the Lord, in the largest sense of the term, is always at hand. We may be afflicted, disappointed, utterly baffled, and brought to the very lowest depth of humiliation, yet the day is coming on. "In such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." "The Lord will suddenly come to his temple." This is our hope in all evangelistic and missionary work. We send out men and women and Bibles to heathen lands, and then we wish for the day. We hear from our missionary friends that one and another is turning his heart unto the Lord, and then we say with joy, "The day is coming on." This should be the refrain of our life-song. Never let the Christian think that the night is coming on except for such providential purposes as shall make the following day still more brilliant. It may be quite true that we have only two or three converts in great India or China, but the day is coming on. It is in our own hearts. You had a generous impulse, you followed a noble sentiment, you forgave a soul that had trespassed against you,—this is the Lord's doing: the day is coming on.

Let this be a message to all sufferers, and especially to all who

are approaching the end of earthly life: "I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." Say to such as are longing for the Lord's presence, "The day is coming on." The day of heaven! "There shall be no night there." Whisper in the dying ear, "The day is coming on." Say to those who are of a fearful heart because the darkness is sevenfold and the storm is an infinite noise, "The day is coming on." Thus we live in the promises. God has given a word suitable to every hour in human life. God sends his revelations as we are able to bear them. Then why art thou disquieted within me, O soul of mine? Hope thou steadfastly in God. Wait patiently for him. Say to thyself in the deepest shadows, and thus prove the reality of thy faith, "The day is coming on."

"And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm."—MARK iv. 39.

This miracle is likely to be true because a still larger miracle along the same lines we ourselves have verified. Whenever Jesus arises there immediately follows a great calm. That is the teaching of the text. Omitting intervening words, the text will stand thus:

"He arose, and there was a great calm." We know this to be true in our own daily life. It is true in the case of temper. However high our excitement may be, no sooner does the Jesus-spirit rise in the heart than immediately there is a great calm. He puts down the raging storm of anger and revenge and animosity. So long as we conduct the controversy ourselves the storm will not abate. When we stand aside and call upon the Lord Jesus to control the storm for us, the issue is an infinite peace. What is true in the matter of temper is true also in the matter of anxiety. We fret ourselves about to-morrow. We wonder what the issue of the fray will be. We forecast the harvest and are filled with dismay. In fits of depression we dread the continuance of our life and energy, and we foresee that there is nothing before us but destitution and helplessness. What can cure this disease of anxiety—this cancer of care? Let Jesus arise in the heart, and instantly our forebodings are changed into anticipations of satisfaction and joy. When Jesus arises he says to the anxious heart: "Be still. Stand still and see the salvation of God. Take no thought for the morrow." Thus Jesus rises and asserts his beneficent kingship over human life. What is true in our personal experience is true also as to our social relations.

If a man's ways please the Lord he will make even his enemies to be at peace with him. "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper." We can do little or nothing in social strife. So long as the controversy is between man and man it will grow in force and bitterness; but as soon as Jesus rises in the social heart the spirit of brotherhood will be realised, and the demon of social enmity will be cast out. What is true in the social sphere is equally true in the larger sphere of national and international life. War is driven away when the spirit of Christ arises in any nation. "Put up thy sword into its sheath" is Christ's direction to every angry nation. Politics must give way to spiritual sentiment. Not by management, but by prayer are nations to be brought together in mutual understanding and confidence.

Thus the text verifies itself in all human experience. What we have to do is to put this holy doctrine to the test. We cannot forgive our enemies until Christ rises in our offended hearts and bids us exercise the divine prerogative of pardon. When you have to encounter opposition, rebuff, and contempt, do not undertake to resist in your own name and strength, for then you will surely fail. Awake Jesus, as did the disciples in the text;

invoke the presence of Jesus. Leave the storm to his care, and in such a moment as ye think not there will steal into the heart a great calm.

"To die is gain."—PHIL. i. 21.

Paul often gives us the Christian idea of death. He went so far as to say that death is abolished. He taunted death and mocked the grave, and this he did in the spirit and love of Christ, the Conqueror of death.

The Christian religion is an excellent religion to die in. Seeing that we have to die, and seeing that we ought to die intelligently and rationally, I contend that no religion is so good to die in as is the religion of Jesus Christ. That religion is utterly fearless. The saints of God have never feared the last enemy, except when their faith has been momentarily eclipsed. "Thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory." "More than conquerors through him who loved us." The Christian religion does not make its believers fatalists; it invests them with the energy and the dauntlessness of living faith. Not only is the Christian religion fearless, it is full of visions. It fills the night of dying with innumerable stars. All the promises of God seem to light up the darkening vision of earth's closing hours.

"I see heaven open and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of glory." The dying saint sees troops of angels around his bed. "We have come to an innumerable company of angels." The vision of God as seen in dying hours is the closing earthly revelation. Not only is the Christian religion full of visions, those visions are the better because of the surrounding darkness. "The earth recedes, it disappears, heaven opens on my eyes, my ears with sound seraphic ring." The happiest man in the room is the dying man, who can see in the darkness. The Christian religion is aflame with hope. It sees beyond the river. "Not Jordan's stream nor death's cold flood can fright us from the shore."

But is not all this sentiment? Is it not a delightful dream? Is it not a fantasy? It is not. We can prove the contrary. The Christian religion is the best religion to die in, simply because it is the best religion to live in. The discipline of faith destroys the idea of its being a transient fancy. If the end which we can test is a fact, we are entitled to reason that the end which we cannot test is a fact also. If the living has proved satisfactory, the dying will not prove disappointing. Life is an education for death

when death is regarded, as it always is in the Christian religion, as the beginning of a higher existence.

To enjoy the Christian's death we must live the Christian's life. That is the argument to which there is no answer. Is the Christian life a freak of fancy, a mere mood of the intellect, a fable of the imagination? Look at it. (1) It begins with repentance, with sorrow for sin, with the bitterest self-condemnation. Is that mere fancy? (2) It insists on crucifixion. (3) It demands the constant and unselfish service of others. Where, then, is the theory of fancy? Only those who have experienced the power of the Christian religion can tell of its initial agony, its gradual development, and its triumphant spirit in the presence of all difficulty, and not least in the presence of the last enemy.

"Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, . . . and offer him for a burnt offering."—GEN. xxii. 2.

Something like this occurs almost constantly in the experience of Christian believers. The badge of our faith is a cross. The music of our creed is sacrifice. The missionary is called upon to do something not unlike the sacrifice which was imposed upon

Abraham. Is it nothing to have to leave two or three little children in the home-land, whilst the missionary goes to far-away places to preach the Gospel? Work out this idea in your imagination, and then tell me how a missionary ought to be received when he returns to tell the story of his labour. Not one of us is for a moment to be compared, in the matter of sacrifice, with the heroic missionary of the Cross.

I want, however, to show that this surrender of darling Isaacs, by whatever name they may be known, is the constant requirement of God. For example, every man on coming to Christ has to sacrifice the Isaac of his natural reason if he would enter the inner sanctuary of divine communion. We often interpret the term "reason" too narrowly. When we have lived the faith-life a long time it becomes the true reason, the upper and all-consummating logic. To all the great Christian propositions the first answer of natural reason is a negative. The doctrine of the resurrection may be so put that reason cannot but withhold its assent. Can a mangled body, partly in the sea, partly in foreign countries, partly at home, be reconstructed in the completeness of its old identity? Natural reason at once says, "Impossible!" Can bones and muscles which have been a thou-

sand years in the grave, reduced to the most noxious putridity, stand up as in the days of youthful strength and bloom? Natural reason can return but one answer. It requires faith in its sublimest mood to be able to say in answer to such questions, "With God all things are possible." When Ezekiel was asked whether the dry bones could live, he answered, "Lord, thou knowest." That was a form of the highest faith, for it expressed the repose of the soul in the gracious omnipotence of God. What applies to the resurrection applies also to the doctrine of Providence as it is ordinarily understood. In this matter, as in the matter of the resurrection, we have to slay the Isaac of unsanctified reason. Looking round upon the whole condition of human society, who can believe in the presence and the government of an all-superintendent Father? Appearances are in favour of atheism. The righteous man is mocked and disappointed, whilst the unrighteous man has only to touch the very dust of his feet in order to turn it into gold. To loving souls wearisome days and nights are appointed, whilst the glutton or the sensualist revels in riotous health. The bad man has a balance at the bank; the good man may be dependent upon the gifts of charity. Who can see in such social conditions any

trace of a heavenly Fatherhood? Yet it is possible, even in the face of such appalling contradiction and suffering, for Christian faith to arise and say with confidence and emotion, "The Lord reigneth." Christian faith takes in the whole field. It will not have God measured in mean days and months and years; it must connect century with century before it can prove that in all the dislocation and tumult and agony of life there is a shaping hand and a beneficent purpose. Faith then slays the Isaac of the lower reason, and in doing so the angel of the Lord shows how the lower reason may be lifted up into the balmy and invigorating atmosphere of rational faith. These things can only be known by deep and vital experience. He who would save his reason must slay it. He who would receive the gift of faith must come empty handed before the Giver of every good and every perfect gift.

Not only have we to slay the Isaac of the lower reason, we have also to slay the Isaac of self-consideration. Man must get rid of self, and this he can never do by any process of formal logic. Only faith can kill self and replace it with the higher personality of obedient love. "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." "Except

a man deny himself and take up his cross daily, he cannot be my disciple." We cannot serve the mammon of self and the altar of God. We are called to a great venture of faith. We are summoned to throw away all our props and securities and so-called foundations, and to cast ourselves into the invisible arms of the invisible God. This is a sore trial. We need some angel at hand when we lift the knife to strike it into the hard heart of our selfhood.

Not only have we to slay the Isaac of the lower reason and the Isaac of narrow self-consideration, we have also to slay the Isaac of the ever-clamorous and ever-fascinating Present. The things which are near at hand are often overpowering. The taper upon the table seems larger than the moon in the sky. We mistake nearness for bigness; we do not allow for distance and perspective. We say with a foolish show of wisdom, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." Paul said concerning one of his nominal followers, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." How seldom we truly realise the fact that we must part with the grain in order to get it back in a harvest! We must die to live. These are the great conceptions of the Christian religion. We part with our reason

in order that it may come back to us in the larger form of faith; we part with ourselves that we may come into full possession of our souls; we part with the immediate and ever-appealing present that we may receive grace to work day by day in the power of an endless life.

"Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied. . . . Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but thou shalt not anoint thee with oil; and sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine."—
MICAH vi. 14, 15.

Possession is not ownership. A man may be the proprietor of a garden without being the interpreter of its beauty and fragrance. A man may have a house full of pictures, yet never see one of them with the eyes of true appreciation. A man may have a nominal title which gives no idea of the quality of his soul. In relation to property, art, music, men may become mere caretakers. He who loves, owns,—not loves in a miserly and grasping sense, but in the sense of appreciation, sympathy, spiritual appropriation.

Possession is not satisfaction: **"Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied."** There is a spiritual

diabetes. When the soul is in a wrong relation to God everything that it receives goes to waste. There is a deeper hunger than that of the body. Is not he foolish who seeks to satisfy his intellect by making a glutton of his body? Yet this is what men are doing day by day. Fields do not grow wheat for the soul. It is in vain to think that the soul can be satisfied with anything which nature can supply. Much will always have more. If we have a large estate we still desire that other field to complete our property, and having acquired the other field we see one more beyond it, and until we secure that further field we have no real rest though we have a thousand acres already. It is always something beyond that man wants, until he lives, and moves, and has his being in God. Haman was not satisfied so long as Mordecai lived in honour. There is food without relish, laughter without joy, house without home, company without companionship.

Labour does not mean reward : "Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but thou shalt not anoint thee with oil; and sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine." There is a sense in which this is true of all life. The real labourer is often ignored,—other men have laboured and ye have entered into their

labours. The text indicates disappointment, but, taken in a spiritual sense, it should indicate satisfaction. Many a man never sees the results of his ministry whether in the Church or in the family or in the world at large. We must look upon ourselves as labouring with others and labouring for others, and thus realise the whole idea of Christian service. Work for the work and not for the wages. Only be the servant of man as you are first the servant of Christ. You may not see the results of what you have done for your child, but those results will be realised many years hence. Work for a future you may never see. Work for people whose land and whose language you have never known. Thus take the text in the highest sense.

The Gospel bases itself on all these facts and experiences. Are we hungry? There is bread enough in our Father's house and to spare. Are we thirsty? "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters. He that drinketh of this water out of Jacob's well will thirst again, but he that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst." Jesus Christ recognises all the necessities of human life, alike for the body and the soul, and his continual appeal is that we should go to the fountain of living waters and quench the thirst of the soul.

Man can have no pleasure in his property until he has first dedicated it to God. The loaf which we share with the poor is doubled	in the very act of distribution. A wise man said in summing up his life, "I only have what I have given away."
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AD CLERUM.

THAT Jesus Christ came into the world is a fact supported by other evidence than that of the New Testament. Here we are not dealing with mythology, but with history. Then let us raise the question—

Why did Jesus Christ come into the world?

Some say that Jesus Christ came into the world that he might reveal the Father; others, that he might show us an Example; others, that he revealed himself as the head of the race; some, that he might prove in his own blameless and hallowed life the possible perfectness and obedience of self-sacrifice. He showed how self-will might be overcome. He was the supreme Virtue. He was the ideal Man. In him all human excellence culminated. All these answers I reject simply on the ground of insufficiency. To my mind they do not rise higher than the level of personal opinions. They are not revelations; they are not even audacious guesses; the answers are not of the quality of the question. The only sufficing answers that I know of are in the New Testament. Modern inspiration may have discovered them to be wrong, yet I receive them after asking to be guided by God the Holy Ghost. Here they are:—

"He was manifested to take away our sins" (1 John iii. 5).

"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John iii. 8).

"The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John i. 29).

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. i. 15).

"The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke xix. 10).

We feel at once that these are not mere opinions, nor hesitant guesses, nor such answers as any mere man outside the election of grace could have given. If they are wrong they are the sublimest mistakes in history. To bring the personality of Christ within the compass of our opinion would be a profane impertinence. Once Jesus Christ himself showed how impossible it was for mere opinion to compass the magnitude of his personality. "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" This was a challenge to Opinion to do its best. It was a magnificent opportunity. Having heard all that Opinion could do by way of criticism, Christ inquired, "But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." That was the answer of Revelation. Christ instantly and as it were exultantly accepted it as such. For that reason I would humbly go to Revelation for all my answers. Opinion has mocked me: Revelation has filled my soul with light and joy. It is assuredly profitable for doctrine. The answers which have just been quoted are so clear as to make it evident that but for sin we should not have known Christ after the flesh,—in the manner of what we

now call the Incarnation. We owe Jesus to sin. But what is sin? It is a familiar word in the New Testament. Without it such a Testament would have been impossible. Yet Jesus himself hardly ever used the word, perhaps never in exactly the same sense in which the Apostles used it. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke it would be substantially true to say that sin is a word hardly named at all. In John the term does occur a few times, but hardly in the Pauline sense. Yet Jesus was manifested to take away our sins! For this purpose the Son of God was manifested! Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners!

What is sin? Let us regard it as disobedience, violation of law, revolt from God, self-will, self-indulgence,—each of these, all of these, even more than all. It is easier to feel what sin is than to say what it is. A possible difficulty may be thus stated: As sin is a spiritual offence, why not overcome it by spiritual means? Why an incarnation, a crucifixion, a blood-offering, a resurrection? Does the remedy lie along the same line as the disease? As the offence was moral, should not the remedial agency be moral also? It is characteristic of the greatest questions that they cannot be wholly answered. It is especially characteristic of the Bible that its events bring their own explanation. No book calls for so much retrospect as the Bible. Other books can explain themselves at every point of their own progress, but the Bible explains in one century what it says in another. Its very revelations are enigmas until the answers come. This was made very clear by Jesus Christ himself, who after his resurrection began at Moses and the prophets and all the Scriptures, and expounded to the dejected disciples the things concerning himself. Why could they not read them intelli-

gently for themselves? There was the writing, why did they not read it and grasp its meaning? When Jesus Christ expounded the Scriptures, he re-wrote them. He is still their one Expositor. The Bible is a sealed book to the oldest and wisest of men until it is opened by the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Thus the Bible is not to be compared with other books. Its meaning does not come through criticism, but through spiritual illumination ; it is the gift of God. The reason of the Incarnation, then, must be found in the events which accompanied and followed it,—in the events which may be happening in our own day,—in the present facts of our own experience.

The Incarnation of Christ was the divine answer to another incarnation. Sin had already clothed itself with flesh. It had made itself visible above all other spectacles. It had darkened the whole sky. There is no doubt about this degraded incarnation,—sin had poisoned the very blood, and shamed the heavens with wantonness. Christ, then, had not to address himself to a metaphysical or transcendental difficulty—a spiritual tragedy which had not come into the sphere of words and deeds—something living far back in the soul as a spectre hardly assured of its own existence. That was not the problem. The world was lying in the wicked one. It was in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. Here is an insight into its condition :—

“When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful ; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise,

they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and to four-footed beasts, and creeping things. They were filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God."

That was the problem! That was the first incarnation! *Then* was Jesus born in Bethlehem of Judea, and the people that sat in darkness saw a great light.

If, then, we want a definition of sin, we must read its own history and thus study its own incarnations. It is not an etymological term; it is a bitter experience. To the intellect sin may be little more than a word more or less indicative of some superficial or temporary flaw, slip, irregularity, or mischance: to the heart which has seen its first vision of holiness, it is everything that can be typified by the word hell,—it is the abominable thing which God hates,—it is a blasphemy which disdains the portrayal of words. There must be a vision of sin as well as a vision of holiness; they have reciprocal effects. We must see ourselves before we can see God: we must see God in order to see ourselves. This is a difficulty in words, yet the heart knows the answer to the riddle. But how can there be sin if man is an evolution rather than a creation? Has he not come up through all the countless ages higher and higher, glorious with ever-brightening splendour?

If we say "Yes," we do not disprove the Bible account, we may only illustrate it. Even science may be confronted by practice, and compelled to pay some attention to commonplace. We ourselves are the best answers to the evolution which flatters us. Let us talk the matter out quite frankly :—We have come up from the lowest form of life ; we have outgrown many signs of early degradation ; we have, through millions of ages, passed from beasthood to manhood ; we can think, speak, act ;—quite true ; but does it follow that we cannot sin ? Can we not bite and devour one another ? Is murder impossible ? Is falsehood beyond our reach ? If we can do wrong, when did we begin to do it ? Why did we begin to do it ? When did we become conscious of it ? If it is a part of a great Necessity, why do we punish it ? Why not tolerate it in others ? Why complain of it ? If it is point in progress, why chafe under it, resent it, condemn it, and load it with penalty ? The Christian contention is that at whatever point man did wrong, at that point he needed divine interposition. There must have been a moment when man became a responsible agent, whether he was developed or created, the proof being that he is now at all events a responsible agent ; and the argument is, that when he became a responsible agent he did something which affected his own moral standing and history. That something we call Sin. That something called sin Christ was manifested to destroy, to take away, to forgive. Evolution is a theory : Sin is a fact.

It was to the fact of Sin that Christ immediately addressed himself. He began to preach, and to say, "Repent." This was his first sermon. The keynote was full of significance. "Repent," pronounced by such lips, was a condensed statement of the world's condition. "For the kingdom of heaven is at hand," was Christ's way of

announcing his own personality. He was himself that kingdom and its King. In this business of sin-destruction the earth needs the heavens. The action is spiritually astronomic. The motive or the reason must come from above, not to terrify by its dignity, but to sustain and redeem by its sufficiency. Hence the mingled tragedy and glory of that opening call—

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Then came the miracles saying the same thing in another language. They were full of the kingdom of heaven in its tender, domestic, healing aspect. They were gospels for the body: but not for the body only; only for the body as an entrance to the soul. It was the inner vision Christ wanted to open when he healed the blindness of the body. The leprous flesh was cleansed that a way might be found to the leprous soul. After the sermon and the miracles came the Cross, repeating the same mystery of thought and recovery, but with a pathos unique and ineffable. The Cross cannot be explained. To nail our poor theories on that tree but shows how our love has cooled and stiffened and expired. It is a mystery as a fact; it is a mystery as an explanation,—yet a mystery which communes with the heart and fills it with unutterable joy; a twilight mystery; the password of the evening breeze, on which the Lord ever comes to Eden; a mystery better known through tears than through speech, yet that may be known in a way no words can explain. We must not think of it as too dazzling to be useful, but as too tender to be rejected. I would only remove the mystery from the cold intellect that I might transfer it to the glowing heart.

But the Cross is associated with blood. Yes. We must not set up our refinement against Christ's agony. Let us

warn our very souls against the shameful affectation of being more appalled by the blood than by the sin. A very wonderful thing this is that man should have become so refined as to shrink from blood and yet be able to speak of sin as if it shocked no feeling. Thus we deceive ourselves. We pretend to sink the sinner in the gentleman when we stand before the Cross. This may be the deepest depth of infatuation. On the other hand, we must not think of blood only, but of the blood of Christ. Nor of the blood of Christ only, but of "the precious blood of Christ,"—the very word being twice qualified and thus raised out of common thought into regions of dignity and holiness. The last of Christ's miracles before the resurrection was to turn his own blood into wine. That blood lay beyond the reach of Roman spear. That blood did not fall upon the earth and waste itself in the dust. Corruptible gold could have bought corruptible redemption, but we have come by faith to know that we "are not redeemed with corruptible things."

When we sink into the humiliation which alone befits our sense of sin—when we abhor ourselves in dust and ashes—the thing above all other things that we do not want is an Example. After redemption we need it, but not before. To preach to me the fact and the doctrine of Christ's Example when I am stung through and through with experiences of my sin is simply to mock me. It is to oppose to me an infinite sneer. I then want a Saviour, not an Example. I want salvation, not rebuke. Do not say to me, "See in Christ an instance of self-sacrifice and loving obedience," but say to me, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." Bring down your gospel to the pit of my helplessness. Tell angels of examples, but to the sinner preach a Saviour. And that

Saviour must have in his hands the print of the nails and in his side the wound of the spear. I must see them and feel them by faith. The redness of his apparel must proclaim his quality. He must not come to me in the snow of his holiness, but in the crimson of his sacrifice. The shame of my sin can bear the sight of his blood. This would be ecstasy but for the humiliation and the sorrow of my soul. My contrition takes it out of the rank of romance and sets it at the head of facts. As the Cross is the one way to heaven, so conscious sin is the one way to the Cross. To the intellect it is foolishness, to pride it is a stumbling-block, but to broken-heartedness and self-helplessness it is the very power and love and glory of God.

The heart has many moods, and the aspects of Christ and his work must be various enough to meet them all. Science is for experts; the Cross is for sinners. As the world is many, so the heart itself is many. It must be met in every experience, especially in its agony on account of sin. The temptation of the expert is to write for experts. He cannot easily change his apparatus. He talks to his peers, or to those who may become his peers, through long training and much acquisition. But the evangelist talks to the common heart, speaking to every man of the wonderful works of God in the tongue wherein the man was born. This is the great translation. This is the pentecostal miracle. Thus instead of emptying the gospel message out of one language into another, God the Holy Ghost enables every man who has received the gift of life to tell the gospel story in the only truly original language of living and definite experience. Grammar is not excluded; it is subordinated. The expert and the evangelist should work together. In this connection the

point is that Christ's work should appeal to every mood of the heart, and that to exclude the evangelical view of that work is to leave the heart without comfort or hope in its bitterest desolation. It is not to be supposed that the world is full of experts who are only waiting for a rectified record in order to become Christians. We must not imagine that the question of dates is standing between men and the forgiveness of their sins. Such questions are by no means unimportant, yet there are other questions which infinitely transcend them in urgency. Take this case: "What must I do to be saved? I have sinned against Heaven with an outstretched arm. By day I have no light and by night no rest because of the pain and shame of self-reproach. I dare not look towards God in his righteousness. I am hopeless, helpless, desolate." What is the answer to the condition faintly indicated by these confessions, for be it always understood that such agony has no adequate speech? I have always found that the best answer is the Cross, and that the reply of the Cross is this:—

1. Jesus Christ came expressly to meet such cases.
2. That Jesus Christ did something for the sinner which the sinner could never do for himself. What that something is no words can fully tell.
3. That Jesus Christ tasted death for every man.
4. That where sin abounded grace did much more abound.
5. That Christ is able to save unto the uttermost.

These are the great evangelical replies, and by them the

sincerity of the inquirer may be tested beyond doubt. Broken-heartedness on account of personal sin will never chafe under such gracious and healing counsel. These replies are greater than literal criticism. They are spiritual answers to a spiritual condition. They express the majesty and the pathos of the crucified Christ. There are moments in the soul's suffering when that word

CRUCIFIED

shines with the glory of an immediate revelation. It represents the tenderest love of God. It bruises the serpent's head.

Have we not some hints of deeper meanings in the case of common human suffering? Here is one mourning for his firstborn, and will not be comforted. The life so lovely, the grave so deep and cold, the farewell so long; the poor heart cannot bear it; faith totters under a mortal blow; the very soul is almost turned into desperate blasphemy. Who amongst us can touch that agony?—who dare speak to such sacred woe? Can the physiologist calm the heart by his science? Can the physician recall the vanished joy by some professional statement? Who, then, can find the door of the sanctuary? Only one who has suffered a kindred loss. One who has been crucified. One who knows the password of grief. Sorrow must speak to sorrow. Wound must speak to wound. So with the deeper agonies. We have not an high priest that cannot be touched. He lays his wounds on ours,—he heals us with his blood.

This can hardly be explained in words. Perhaps we may find it convenient at this point—face to face as we are with such unfathomable words as Sin and Blood—to make up our minds to some working estimate

of the limit and function of Explanation as applied to Christian mysteries. For my own guidance, personally and pastorally, I have laid down a few governing principles. Thus :—

1. The human can never fully grasp or realise the whole meaning of the divine.
2. The inability of the human to grasp the whole meaning of the divine is not a humiliation but a necessity and a discipline.
3. To insist upon the literal and exhaustive explanation of spiritual mysteries is one of the most deceitful impulses of intellectual vanity.
4. Every attempt to bring spiritual mysteries within purely intellectual apprehension is to encroach upon the function of the heart as the best interpreter of God.
5. Obedience to the divine will is the primary condition of knowing all that is knowable of the divine doctrine.

Within the range of these principles I have escaped the frets and disappointments inseparable from fruitless ambitions, and in that degree have been enabled to bring undivided attention to bear in legitimate directions. They have, too, if I may continue to be personal, had a useful effect upon all my endeavours after what is called definite religious teaching. I have lived to know that we can be as definite in declaring a mystery as in stating a fact. The soul may be a long time in coming to the apprehension of that possibility. The mystery is itself a fact. We

have to walk under the sky, not over it. We have to worship God, not to understand him. The honest teacher will never be ashamed to say, "I do not know." He must often say so; and at these points, marked against trespass, he and his students will unite in common prayer, and temptation may be resisted by fasting. We cannot be as definite in the statement or even in the apprehension of spiritual truth—the truth which is without form—as in the statement of scientific facts, for reasons which lie within the facts themselves. Science concerns itself with phenomena, with the measurable, the ascertainable, the concrete; and when it gets to the limit of phenomena it stops, lest it should stumble upon a religion. With what does religion concern itself? With God and sin and motive; with redemption, forgiveness, character, destiny. Science can make all the words it wants for the telling of its wondrous tale; but religion is always short of words, and so is driven into exclamations and impetuositities which literalists easily mistake for cant. It cries out, "Who can find out the Almighty unto perfection? Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him? O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out!" Whether in the body or out of the body, the spiritual man is often quite uncertain; and as for the things he hears in the higher places—the subdued thunders, the thrilling whispers, the weird beating of unseen wings, the inscriptions in half-lightning and in half-gloom—he says, such communings and visions are not for words, they are for the heart's mute wonder. In religion there are few things we can fitly tell. Religion can sometimes do little more than hint at its own secret. We can measure the altar, but not the prayer. We can tell all about the Roman gallows,

but language is hushed and awed before the Christian Cross. The crucifixion is Roman ; the Atonement is divine. We know it and receive it and trust it expressly in its character as a mystery. It must not be supposed that because it is a mystery we do not know it. Forgetting that a doctrine may be received as a mystery, we confuse all the higher truths and put them in a false relation. It is a high attainment of knowledge to know that some things cannot be known. It is just at that point that the divine faculty for which the best name is Faith begins its unique work in the soul. Faith does no commerce in the small market of explanations. Faith has infinite ventures on the seas and continents of mystery. It is the substance of things hoped for ; the evidence of things not seen. Thus we stand in a great mystery. Sin and Atonement, Law and Forgiveness, Holiness and Destiny, are mysteries. We hold them in Christian faith : all we know about them we learned from a Book which has taken such hold of our highest nature that we have come to regard it reverently as

THE WORD OF GOD.

INDEX OF TEXTS.

OLD TESTAMENT.

	PAGE		PAGE
Genesis xxii. 2	188	1 Chronicles xix. 3	179
— xlix. 29, 31	176	— xxiii. 28	83
Exodus i. 6	178	Nehemiah vii. 2	63
— xxxiv. 6	167	Job xxvii. 10	135
Numbers xiv. 27	95	Psalms xxiii. 1	183
Deuteronomy ii. 5; ii. 9	170	— xxxi. 5	11
1 Samuel ii. 18	34	Isaiah ix. 6	171
2 Kings v. 1	174	Ezekiel xlii. 20	105
1 Chronicles x. 6	178	Micah vi. 14, 15	190

NEW TESTAMENT.

Matthew ii. 1	3	Acts xvii. 25	173
— xiii. 52	115	— xxvii. 29	184
Mark iv. 26-29	181	Romans xvi. 1, 2	53
— iv. 39	185	2 Corinthians ii. 14	169
— x. 19	146	Galatians iv. 9	166
Luke ix. 21	168	Ephesians i. 19	125
— xvi. 25	156	— ii. 7	125
— xxiv. 37	20	Philippians i. 21	187

